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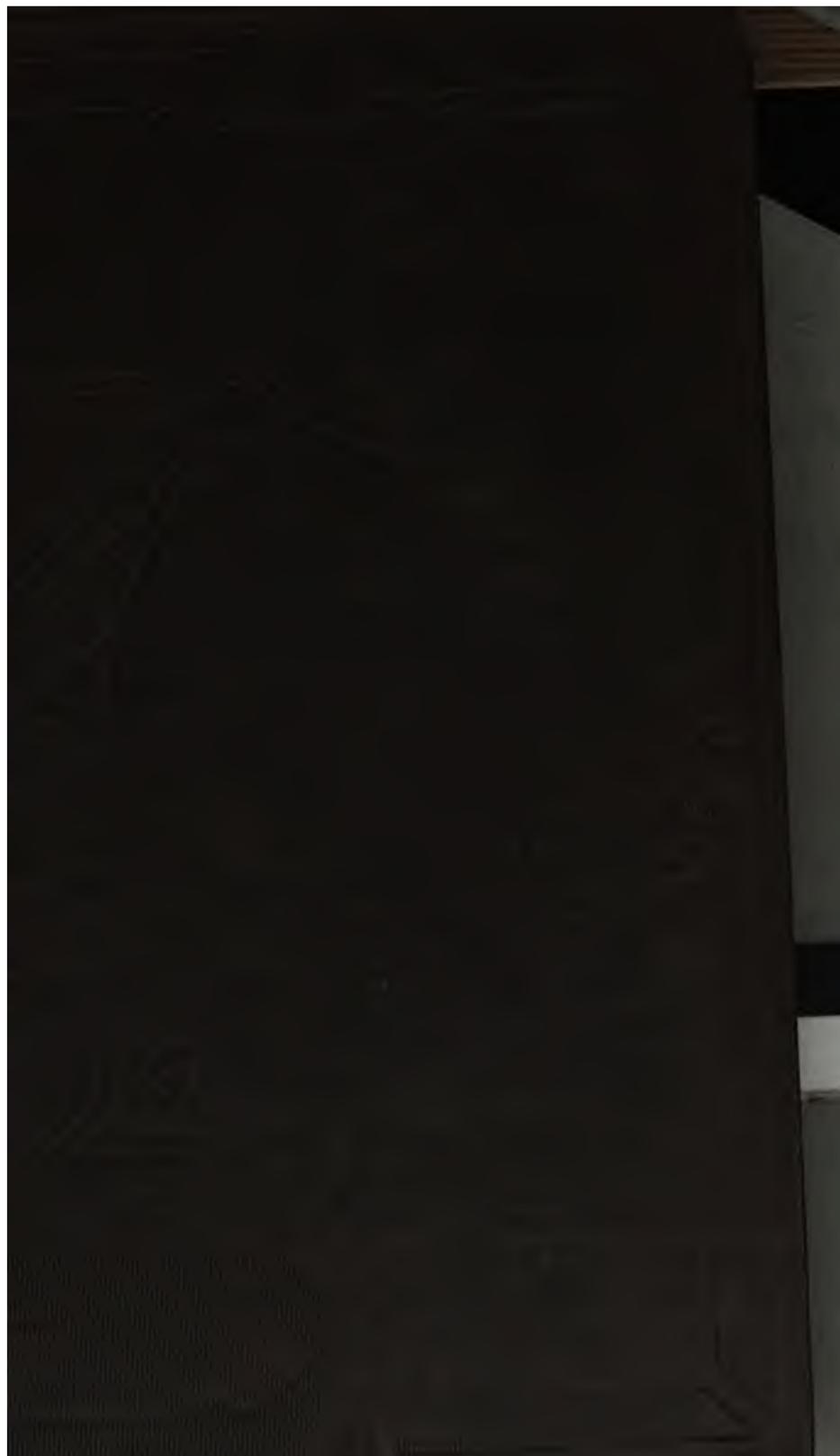
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THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY.

A. Nobel.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "OLIVE" AND "THE OGILVIES."

Miss Mulock.

"NON TI LAGNAR, MA SOFFRI, E TACI!"

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:

CHAPMAN AND HALL, 198, PICCADILLY.

MDCCLII.

249. W. 315.



I DEDICATE THIS BOOK

TO NO PERSONAL FRIEND, BUT TO ONE WHO HAS
FOR YEARS BEEN THE GOOD INFLUENCE OF MY LIFE.
NOTHING SHE KNOWS, OR EVER MAY KNOW OF ME:
YET IT PLEASES ME TO OFFER THIS—PROBABLY THE
LAST NOVEL I SHALL WRITE FOR SOME TIME—TO A
WOMAN, THE MERE NAMING OF WHOM INCLUDES AND
TRANSCENDS ALL PRAISE,—

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.



THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY.

CHAPTER I.

NINIAN *GRÆME* stood at his own door, waiting for it to be opened unto him;—the sooner the better, any one would have thought who noted the miserable weather without. The little square—it was one of those dull ones in the New Town of Edinburgh, where grass grows among the pavement-stones, and the very sparrows seem half asleep—was filled with a dense white mist, rare indeed to the clear atmosphere of the hill-city, but when it does

come, fraught with intense cold that pierces to one's very soul. Yet Ninian did not seem to feel it. He stood, looking down the blank street of which his own abode made the corner-house. But he evidently saw nothing—at least with his outward eyes.

At length, turning round, his attention was caught by the bright brass door-plate—on which was inscribed, “Professor Græme.” He gave a momentary start, and his close-set lips quivered once or twice; but soon he resumed the quiet manly bearing which seemed habitual to him.

The maid opened the door. “Are they come?” was Ninian’s hasty question.

“Eh, sir? Na, na, it’s no the time. At sax o’clock, Miss Græme said——”

“Yes—you’re right, Katie,” answered the young man, as he unrolled himself from his damp plaid and hung it to dry. In so doing, he knocked down a heavy oaken stick, which he took up, touching it tenderly, while the same passing pang troubled his countenance

“Here—put this by somewhere—in my room,” he said, in a whisper. “And, Katie”—he half-opened the front door and pointed to the brass plate, then added with an effort, as though mute actions came easier to him than words, “see that this is taken off—early, mind! before my sisters can see it to-morrow morning.”

“I will do that, Mr. Ninian—or Mr. Græme, as ye are noo,” answered Katie, in a subdued tone, as she disappeared with her apron to her eyes.

Ninian went up-stairs to his sister. She sat by the fire sewing a dress of some mourning material commoner than the one she wore. That, together with a certain pallor and gravity in her look, and an indescribable yet unmistakeable shadow over the whole house, indicated that this was a home which had been lately visited by the dread Guest who must come at times to all.

As Mr. Græme entered, the sister looked up and smiled;—no, not exactly smiled, but a pleasantness came over her features. It

was evident that Ninian was one of those whose presence brings light at all times and under all circumstances. She put down her work and came to him.

“ You are not wet, are you ? It is a dreary day.”

“ Indeed, I wish the children had had a better one for their journey, or that I could have fetched them myself. Are all things ready for them at home, Lindsay ?”

“ Quite ready.”

“ I need scarcely have asked that question of Our Sister,” said Ninian; and his manner expressed affection, quiet, indeed, but perfectly at rest and sure—so sure, that no outward show was asked or needed.

“ Will you dine now ? or have dinner and tea together when the children arrive ? I thought you would like that best, brother ?”

“ Certainly !”

The colloquy ceased. Brief and subdued it was, as if they tried to speak on ordinary topics, and just as usual—both feeling over

them the shadow of some heavy thought, which each, for the other's sake, tried to lift off, and could not.

"It is nearly dark, Lindsay. Had you not better put your work away?"

She did so—mechanically it seemed—as if simply because Ninian desired her. She was evidently accustomed to do as he said in everything. Then the brother and sister both sank into silence, sitting on either side the fire. Grey shadows crept over the room, in the dark corners, and about the vacant chairs; but still at the hearth where they two sat it was warm and bright.

They were very like one another, though Lindsay Græme was apparently some years the elder. Neither were handsome—in fact, to Ninian might reasonably be applied that adjective which Southrons often give to a thoroughly Scottish face—hard-featured. All the lines were bold, clear, and somewhat rugged, though he was still a young man. But he had that which to his sex is worth ten times more than beauty of feature—a

stature combining height, strength, dignity, and grace. Yet his was not an ugly physiognomy either. It was the sort of face that you would instinctively trust. Looking at it, you could put your whole worldly estate, your character, your life itself, into his hands, and feel that all were in safe keeping. In fact, a runaway bankrupt, his debtor too, once did so. And Ninian was faithful to the trust, even though it entailed upon him perpetual trouble in settling the affairs of the absent defaulter, and in exercising some show of authority over two most refractory boys and one girl, who from their London boarding-schools kept up a perpetual warfare with their unseen Scottish guardian.

Lindsay—her likeness shall follow after her brother's, as, despite her seniority, she ever followed, in sweet humility—Lindsay Græme was—just a woman, nothing less, and nothing more! She never was and never had been thought clever or beautiful, and now she had passed the age when she cared to be thought either. Also, there was at

times a look in her face, which seemed as if not age alone had produced the softened calm it wore—this sealing up of all youth's restless emotions into one serene repose. Whatever shadow had swept over her, it had left no bitterness, no heartlessness, scarcely even grief. It was probably that one—the most sanctifying woe of all—when the angel of death, reascending, opens heaven, and suffers a portion of heaven's light to fall on those looking sorrowfully upwards, whose faces, like that of Moses, bear some trace of this brightness evermore.

For her outward appearance, it was just ordinary enough; you would not notice her, except, perhaps, for the grave neatness of her black dress—she always wore black; or for a certain sweetness in her voice, which ever pierced through the Babel of all other voices in the room, like a drop of clear water falling on a crystal floor. For the rest of her looks, she had a fair skin, flaxen hair, that would always be flaxen—never grey. She generally wore a sort of half-cap of black

lace, which, though she probably did not know it, was the most becoming head-tire a lady of her age and complexion could have chosen.

Nothing broke the silence, except the occasional falling of a coal from the fire, or the cat jumping from her doze on the hearth up to Ninian's knee, whence she was not displaced. It argues well for a young man's disposition when he is amicably disposed towards cats—and babies.

“Half an hour yet!” said Ninian, looking at his watch. “I can walk to the coach-office in ten minutes; but it is better to be before than after the time. Let us have tea quite ready, and the fire bright. I want the children to feel that they have come home —to a cheerful home.”

“You are right, brother, quite right. *He* would have said so.”

“I think he would. And since they are younger than we, and have been away during all the trouble which we two have shared together, we cannot expect them to

feel exactly as we do. And now they are coming home, we must try to make it a happy home to them, as it was in our father's lifetime."

"Yes, Ninian, we will. And we must never let them feel that there is not the full tie of blood between us and them, remembering that our father was their father, and that their mother is dead as well as our ours."

So spoke Lindsay, in a low voice, as she stood leaning by the hearth; the light shining on her hands, that hung down loosely linked together, but her face hid in shadow, as it always seemed to be when she betrayed more emotion than her ordinary life expressed.

There was no more said between the brother and sister, and Ninian soon rose and went down stairs. But ere leaving the house he came up once more. Lindsay was still standing by the fire, her hands folded—that quiet passive attitude into which they seemed naturally to fall. It was her habit;

one of those outward tokens of inward things which may so often be noticed.

Ninian went up to his sister and kissed her—but gravely, as if it were a rare thing between them. She leant her head on his shoulder for a minute, said “Thank you, Ninian,” and then followed him to the hall-door. From thence she went down to the kitchen and up to the drawing-room, busying herself in all housewifely preparations until that most nondescript, abundant, and agreeable meal—a Scotch tea-dinner—was smiling on the board. This done, she went and stood by the fire in her old attitude, from the which she never moved until the loud ring at the door-bell announced that “the children” were come.

It was a decided misnomer to call them *children*. The two eldest—I speak advisedly, for one glance proclaimed them twins—were “sonsie lassies” (no other term will suit them so well), apparently about twenty. There was another girl, who was

evidently that fortunate, fairy-gifted one, the “youngest princess” of the family; and there were two or three boys, scattered in and about the line of girls for which the Græme family had once been renowned, until in the late Professor’s household the numbers of each sex became nearly equal. Altogether, there were six to be counted. Ninian stood at the door and let them pass him by, one by one, to receive the greeting of “Our Sister,” as Lindsay was called *par excellence*. It seemed to be a tacit agreement, that while the others had their various Christian names, Ruth and Esther, Edmund, Christina, Reuben, Charles, bandied about under all sorts of odd nicknames and diminutives, Ninian and Lindsay were emphatically called “Brother” and “Sister.”

The whole tribe had rushed in from their journey with a tired forgetfulness of everything but the relief of coming home; and for some minutes the house was alive with voices; Katie, poor old soul! being summoned hither and thither till it almost drove

her crazy. But when, one after the other, the young travellers assembled to tea in the old familiar room—where everything looked the same, save for the one missing presence that would be seen no more—then a great quietness came over all. The twins crept nearer to each other, and Christina, ever the readiest either to laugh or weep, hid her face on Lindsay's shoulder. But no one spoke a word.

They gathered round the table—Lindsay sitting where she had presided for some years as mistress of her father's household. Opposite to her was that father's empty chair. Each glanced that way, and then all eyes were lowered. None looked up, and all kept silence as Ninian came in and took the vacant place. There was a pause—as if each waited for the voice that never would be heard more; and then Ninian, in his low quiet voice, said the grace:

“Lord, we thank Thee for these and all Thy mercies; and forgive us our sins, for Christ's sake. Amen.”

And all felt this to be the token whereby their brother took upon himself the duties, responsibilities, and rights of eldership, and became henceforth the Head of the Family.

It was a goodly sight—as indeed it always is—to see what may truly be termed a Family! Israel's king surely knew it, when he likened it to a table set round about with olive-branches—always a fairer table than one without. Perhaps Ninian, too, thought thus; and after the first sorrowful cloud had passed away from the circle, it was with a sense not only of duty but of pleasure that he looked round on his young brothers and sisters, having a kindly and a cheerful word for each.

“ Well, and what sort of a journey was it? You must have nearly filled the coach yourselves.”

“ We wanted all to come outside,” said Ruth, the one of the twins who generally took the lead, in virtue of a more serious demeanour, and fifteen minutes more experience of life than her sister Esther. “ We

thought," she added, looking down, "that now we ought to be more careful of expense. But our friends at Lanark overruled all, and took places for us girls inside."

"And much good their kindness was to Tinie, at least," said Reuben, an old-fashioned-looking, mathematical-headed little fellow, whose face might indicate any age from thirteen to thirty. "Tinie actually insisted on coming outside before we had travelled half-way, though we were driving through a mist that I could almost have cut with a knife."

"Tinie! Tinie!" said Ninian, with a reproachful shake of the head to the lassie who sat next to him, the "youngest princess"—and a creature beautiful and blithe as youngest princesses always happen to be; in fact, the flower of the family, so far as looks went, and as such evidently worn by "Our Brother" in his heart of hearts.

"I couldn't help it," pouted Tinie's pretty lips. "It was so dull inside, and Ruth and Esther did nothing but talk to one another,

which they always do, telling me to 'go out of the way, as I'm only a child.' A child, indeed!"

" You ought not to behave like a child, then," answered the grave Reuben, " and especially before a minister. Mr. Forsyth travelled with us, brother; and I'm sure he must have been shocked at the way she went on, chattering like a magpie."

" I always do so on principle to *douce*, quiet, saint-like young men of his description. It rouses them, and brings them down to the level of this world. For the same reason I shall keep on pulling Edmund's hair occasionally"—and she suited the action to the word—" or else, as now, he'll be floating off into the clouds, and we shall hear no more of him."

Edmund, poor victim, turned round with a patient air and a " What did you want, Christina?" He had a more thoughtful look than any of them, and in his face was the delicate beauty of boyhood. The features were good—the mouth especially; but its

form, while indicating great sensitiveness and susceptibility, had a want of firmness in the lines, from which a physiognomist would augur ill. In short, no one could much observe Edmund Græme without a feeling of interest and affection (for his sweet nature was evident in his whole mien), nor yet without a certain anxious looking forward to the problem of life which the boy had yet to solve—the great battle of life which he had yet to fight.

No embryo genius was ever a prophet in his own country. As Edmund woke up from his reverie, a smile went round the circle; and when, with varying colour and knitted brows, he began desperately wielding his knife and fork, the smile grew into a titter. Especially as Charlie, the wag and scapegrace of the family—in every family there is always one—took advantage of the conclusion of the meal to mount guard behind “Ned’s” chair, and there perform a succession of heroic and sentimental attitudes for the especial amusement

of every one but the unconscious youth himself.

— Of every one, save Ninian, who had been called away, and Lindsay, who sat by the fireside in her usual place. A momentary shade troubled her countenance as she regarded the young group, saying to herself, “Two months—and forgotten already.” But she knew that youth is youth—transient even in its deepest emotions; and that God meant it should be so. Otherwise, which of us could ever bear life’s burden into middle age?

Ninian soon re-entered the room. They were all collected round the fire, some sitting, some standing. One only place was left vacant—the great leather arm-chair, which the father had used to fill. Charlie, with his customary thoughtlessness, was about to take possession of it, by jumping in all-fours; but Reuben had held him back, whispering something which made them all grow silent and grave.

“ Any room for me, children?” asked



Ninian, as he stood on the outside of the circle round the fire. The younger boys answered by moving the arm-chair to its olden spot, while Edmund took his brother by the hand and placed him in it. It was a mute acknowledgment from them all of the double relation which he was in future to hold—elder brother and father.

Ninian evidently felt it. He sat down; held his hand over his eyes for a few moments; then his grave, quiet, affectionate smile lightened around on them all, and each knew without more words that the family bond was sealed.

They soon seated themselves round the fire; Lindsay at her work, the twins lounging together on the sofa, and Tinie crouched on the hearth-rug, her two little hands folded over Ninian's knee. Edmund sat opposite, leaning on his elbows, and looking dreamily into the fire. Which said fire Reuben also contemplated with equal intentness, though with different motives, being evidently bent on making discoveries in gas; for whenever

a small jet of flame appeared, he poked at it with such determined energy, that the peace of the rest of the company was considerably disturbed. Charlie also contributed a few of those trifling annoyances which seem necessary clouds to diversify the beauty of the family atmosphere ; amusing himself at intervals by awakening the cat, and hunting her from corner to corner with a vivacity of delight, which proved the truth of the celebrated remark, "that man's natural propensity was to hunt *something*."

An hour or two passed in this manner, and then, when some chance allusion had made the conversation grow serious and subdued, Ninian said gravely :

" Children,"—he frequently called them "children," though not in an overbearing tone, with a sort of loving eldership—" there are a few things I want to talk to you about, or rather for us all to talk them over together. Shall we do so now, or defer it until another time?"

They all answered, " Now!"

" I think so too; there is nothing like

doing what must be done, at once. We cannot know the future. Little we thought, when we so rejoiced over our father's appointment on that scientific expedition, that he would never return to us from it, but that his grave would be in a foreign land."

There ensued a mournful silence, and Tinie's face was lowered, while her hand sought convulsively that of her elder brother. He took hers and kept it—though he was unused to caressing moods. But perhaps, looking down upon her, he remembered that she had been all her life her father's darling. So he made no more allusion to the now silent name.

" You will easily understand, children, that our loss makes a great difference in the family income; for though Lindsay has her mother's little fortune, and I my profession, still we shall not be rich, for a man cannot gain much by the law until he is far older and more established in the world than I am. Then we must consider Edmund's and Reuben's classes, and Charlie's school; for

I am sure that we would all wish our three brothers to be educated as our father intended, even though we should each have to make some little sacrifice for the same."

The girls answered with a cheerful "Yes"—all except Lindsay. Her sacrifices were never made in words—and everybody knew that, or guessed it. For Lindsay was the only one among them who was "independent;" and many an envious grudge might there have been awakened in the younger sisters, had she not borne her dignities so meekly; while all felt, though none ever saw, the continual generosity of her hand.

"Then, brother," said Reuben, looking up with his serious old man's expression—it was allowed that in Reuben's queer little head was the chief wisdom of the family—"what are we to do? If I might advise——"

"Do so; it will be always open council here," said Ninian, smiling.

"Then, I think, if we went from this

house to one not half so large and fine, and sold all this grand furniture and knick-knackery, and poetry-books and pictures, that are of no use to anybody——”

Here Edmund turned round with an alarmed, appealing air. “ Brother Ninian?——”

“ —And chemical library, and scientific and astronomical instruments,” continued Ninian, taking up the word with a humorous glance at Reuben, who stopped, completely confounded. “ No, my boys,” he added seriously ; “ whatever renunciations we make shall be equal on all sides. But Reuben’s plan is in a great degree the one which I had almost settled in my own mind. Only I wish to do nothing without the knowledge and agreement of my brothers and sisters.”

He then explained to them that he could rent from a client, on easy terms, a large old-fashioned house very near Edinburgh, which would be a pleasant and convenient home for them all for years to come. They

all caught at the idea with the eagerness of youth, and very soon they had coaxed from Ninian a full description of the entire domicile, where Reuben planned a laboratory, Edmund a study, and the twins a flower-garden, while Charlie exulted in the prospect of certain ghost-ridden galleries suitable for play in the day-time, and for frightening people at night.

“And Our Sister is quite satisfied too?” said Ruth at last. Yes! Our Sister not only agreed, but had already gone over the house, and pronounced it good. So after a little more consultation—nominal, indeed, but which pleased and flattered the children, and impressed them, as Ninian wished, with the feeling that his sway over them was not to be an exaction of blind obedience, but of guiding influence—the whole matter was decided.

On retiring to rest, Ninian once more gathered his household together, to take upon him, for the first time, a duty ever religiously observed by his father; for

Professor Græme came of blood that, in the sorrowful days of Covenanting warfare, had dyed purple the Scottish hills. There, as priest of the family flock, self-consecrated, the young man knelt, with his brothers and sisters round him. His voice, at first tremulous, and always low, was touched with a solemnity that showed how deeply he felt the vow he then made in his heart, to be a father unto the fatherless evermore.

They all rose up. Instinctively, one after the other, they went and said good night to Ninian, as they had been accustomed to do to their father—then all disappeared, except the eldest sister. Lindsay stood, her candle in her hand.

“All is well, Ninian. This first night—” She paused—stopped—but the brother and sister understood one another. He smiled; she looked up to him, as if trying to express the great love and reverence there was in her heart—ay, reverence, though he was so much younger than she. But she could not. So they shook hands, bade one an-

other good-night, and Lindsay followed after the rest.

But until long past midnight, till the lamp flickered and went out, and there was but a handful of red cinders left of the fire—Ninian sat there, pondering on the charge he had undertaken, on all that lay before him to renounce, to perform, and to endure.

CHAPTER II.

“WELL, brother, and what is to be done?” asked Lindsay Græme, handing across the breakfast-table a letter which Ninian had given her to read. Whereupon the children were all alive immediately; and their curiosity was only deepened by observing that both their brother and sister looked decidedly perplexed. At last Christina, who sat at Ninian’s side—a place she seemed to have taken of right—ventured in a pretty wilful way to peep over his shoulder and read the epistle, concerning which the important something “was to be done.”

The twins immediately began to frown, Esther muttering that “Tinie always put



herself foremost in everything," and Ruth darting inquisitive glances at the mysterious missive—a pretty note, edged with pink, and sealed with a blue wafer, whereon was embossed an elegant view of the Tower of London.

Ninian looked round on his little flock with his own half-suppressed, half-humorous smile. "Come, children, no contention, please! Tinie, read it aloud."

Tinie read:

"Belle-vue House, Wandsworth.

"SIR,—(ah! that is scratched out, and "Dear Sir," put in instead.) "Mrs. Watson Jones desires me to acknowledge the receipt of your last, and to state that the Christmas holidays are just commencing, when her charge of myself terminates. She wishes to know what instructions you have received from my father concerning me, or where I am to spend the intervening time until his pleasure be known.

"I am, Sir, very respectfully yours,

"HOPE ANSTED."

"A very pretty, proper, school-girl epistle,"

said Tinie, laughing. "Oh, brother! I knew you would have a nice bargain with those wards of yours. What will you do?"

"I am sure I don't know," answered Nian; and he fairly looked uncomfortable. "She ought to be invited here."

"But only fancy an English young lady in our quiet home!" observed Esther.

"Especially at The Gowans," added Ruth.

The twins were thorough Scottish girls, very reserved, and shy of strangers.

"I'm sure three sisters are trouble enough in a house without another girl besides," gruffly said Reuben—a decided misogynist at present.

"I have it—I have it!" said Tinie, clapping her hands. "She would exactly do for that angelic creature whom Edmund is so anxious to find and fall in love with, or, as he describes her himself in a scrap I found in his room,

A something half-divine, half-human,
A dream of bliss, sublimed to woman!"

Here poor Edmund, turning crimson to

his very brow, made a precipitate retreat. All laughed; but the eldest brother looked grave, and desired "that there might be no more of this folly." And Lindsay, always tender over the boy whom she had nursed through many a long sickness, and comforted in many a wayward mood, soon stole out of the room. They all knew it was to seek Edmund. But the young visionary did not appear again: they heard him up-stairs in the drawing-room playing on his beloved piano—Lindsay's gift; probably with Lindsay sitting by him, as she constantly did, though little she understood his music, except through the love of him.

The question concerning Hope Ansted's visit—"to be, or not to be?"—was again revived and discussed in full family conclave, and finally reduced to arbitration between the two elder and ruling powers. Ninian, who, in his grave manhood, had a certain comical dislike to all young girls, and, in fact, had never much cared for any female society

except that of his sisters, made various objections to the plan. But Lindsay happened to discover a postscript to the note, apparently hastily added in a most illegible girlish scrawl:

“ P.S.—Mrs. Jones doesn’t see this. I’ve just heard that my brothers are going to spend Christmas in Edinburgh, and I have not seen Willie and Bob for such a time ! Oh ! Mr. Græme, if you could but manage to get me there !

“ H. A.”

“ Poor little creature!” said Ninian compassionately, evidently quite conquered by this pathetic appeal.

“ Will I write for her to come as soon as we are settled at The Gowans ?” suggested the kind Lindsay.

Mr. Græme assented; rather hastily, for he was just starting to his daily duties as a Writer to the Signet.

Though the son of a professor, Ninian Græme was never termed “ a clever man.”

His manner was nothing remarkable ; he had never written a book or delivered a lecture in his life. Yet it was surprising what a number of the wise and learned folk of Edinburgh courted his acquaintance, and relished his plain good sense and the stores of his well-informed mind. Passing strangers, too, who came to lionise or be lionised among the celebrities of Modern Athens, often took mightily to Ninian Græme. At the present time, there was a young Englishman who positively seemed to haunt him, and to bestow on him that warmth of temporary friendship, often worth little, but always pleasant for the moment. This young man met Ninian at his office-door.

“ Ha, my good fellow, I was just coming after you. I am longing to go to Roslin this fine autumn morning. What say you —shall we take a holiday ?”

“ Your life seems to be one long holiday, Mr. Ulverston.”

“ Not at all. When I’m at home I see

after my property, and study and write." He had, indeed, the look of a man of some brains; but it was a fashionably intellectual look, indicating one who made literature the mere colouring and adornment of life, not its whole aim and end. He was evidently not that individual, most miserable, yet most happy—a poor author. "Come, Græme, you'll go, won't you? You can put off business for a day?" he said, in a tone of persuasive confidence, which marked the man accustomed never to deny himself, and agreeably confident that his pleasure must necessarily be that of everybody else.

"Indeed, I regret it, but I cannot. I have"—here Ninian took up a heap of letters on his table—"I have an hour's work here, which must be attended to. Then I must run down to Musselburgh."

"To Mussleburgh." Mr. Ulverston started, and bent down, tapping his boot with his cane. "Oh! that is some place near Edinburgh, isn't it? Do you know

any one there, or are you going on office-business?"

"Partly on both. I have some law affairs to settle, and must meet a friend who lives there, Mrs. Forsyth."

"Any relation to the Mr. Forsyth to whom you introduced me the other night at Professor Reay's? A young minister, I remember."

"He is Mrs. Forsyth's only son. John Forsyth is one of the best among our young preachers, and his mother, a widow, has need to be proud of him."

"No doubt. Have you known the family long?" asked Ulverston, who seemed to think he had a right to put any questions to anybody, and often did so in a manner that would have been positively rude in any other man. But he had about him such a winning way, that no one was ever offended, and every one charmed with Mr. Ulverston.

"John and I were schoolfellows, and I

have long been his mother's adviser, both in legal and friendly matters. She sends for me to consult me now on a somewhat strange circumstance."

"Ah, do let us hear it." And Ulverston, turning his back to Ninian, set one foot on the fender, and poked the fire with the toe of the other boot.

"Excuse me," said Mr. Græme; "it is a private and rather painful matter, which cannot interest a stranger." The words were courteous, but the tone was firm; and the young Englishman saw at a glance that, with all his gentleness, you might as well try to pump water out of a rock as to coax a secret out of Ninian Græme. So he took up his hat to depart.

"I am sorry I cannot accompany you, Mr. Ulverston," said the good-natured Ninian. "Unless you like to wait here a little, and go with me to Musselburgh—it is rather an interesting town to strangers, and I know all its queer old nooks."

“No, no, I’d rather not.—Well—yes—I think I will,” said the young man on a second thought; and, as he always seemed to follow the last and newest impulse, after some little hesitation he came back, and settled himself at the office fire.

He was a very handsome man—the perfect type of that Norman beauty still seen, though rarely, among the ancient gentry of England. There was something grand and mediæval in the turn of his head, with its curling brown hair: you might have fancied a baron’s casque set there. The long, fair moustache—a pitiable resource in improving most modern faces—looked natural and suitable on his, and hid what might have otherwise marred the correct beauty of the face—the large, somewhat too prominent lips, which, however suited to the sensual Norman baron, showed ill with the refined gentleman of the nineteenth century. Altogether, Mr. Ulverston’s face was a strange compound of power

and feebleness, of the intellectual and the animal combined. He sat there, twisting his figure — perhaps more stylish than graceful — into all sorts of restless attitudes, looking at his watch, poking the fire, reading by snatches at the newspaper, then tearing it up and making it into paper-boats, out of very waywardness and want of occupation, till the hour had slipped by.

Ninian kept to his time punctually—he always did; and they both started for Musselburgh. The young Scotsman took an infinite deal of trouble to explain all concerning the town, from Prince Charlie's bridge down to the traditional rhyme,

“Musselburgh was a borough when Edinburgh was nane,
Musselburgh shall be a borough when Edinburgh's gane.”

—Which seemed the only thing that interested or amused the fitful disposition of Mr. Ulverston, for he kept humming it to himself in an idle way. His conversation was usually rich and sparkling, full of ro-

mance, power, and feeling ; so that in their walks even the quiet Ninian was often carried away by it, and wondered what could be the reason he did not altogether like such a pleasant companion. But to-day it was maintained by snatches, and at last altogether ceased.

“I must leave you soon,” said Ninian, as they walked along ; he taking the wet grassy edge of the footpath, while Mr. Ulverston’s marked footsteps — he had rather a peculiar gait—sounded heavily on the gravel walk. “Here is Mrs. Forsyth’s garden.”

“Is it?” He said no more till they reached the gate.

“Can you wait for me? I will not be long, if possible,” observed Ninian.

“Oh, no! I am going back to Edinburgh. And, by-the-by, I think I shall be off to London in a few days. However, I’ll see you once more. Good-by, my dear fellow.”

He strode away — his steps once more

crunching the gravel, and resounding all along the wall.

Mr. Græme entered the garden, after waiting some time, for the gate was kept carefully locked. Passing along, he saw in the walk underneath the garden wall the figure of a lady.

“Who is that?” he asked of the servant.

“It’s just the new leddy that’s comed here — Mrs. Armstrong. Dinna gang till her — ye’d better not. She’s daft, ye ken !”

“Poor soul!” But though from a sense of delicacy Ninian did not approach, he could not help casting a glance at the “daft leddy.” She did not notice him ; she was listening, with all her ears and all her soul, to some distant sound. Her figure was stooping, her hands crushed together, and her head, turned aside, was bent forward in a perfect agony of intentness. It was a touching picture of melancholy mad-

ness, perhaps haunted with visions imperceptible to the sense of all other human beings. There is great awe and mystery hanging over those whom God has visited thus.

Mrs. Forsyth, a kindly-looking widow, greeted Ninian warmly. She talked a good deal about "John." He was evidently "John the Beloved"—truly named after him of all the disciples the most "divine," who ever seems to cast the shadow of his sanctity over that simple, common-sounding Christian name. Then Mrs. Forsyth asked Ninian about his own family—but formally, she being not very intimate with them. And at last, coming to the point, she began upon the business concerning which she had sent for Mr. Græme—the matter of her insane guest.

"I saw her in the garden. It seems a very quiet madness, as you told me. But what made you take such a charge upon yourself, Mrs. Forsyth?"

"Oh, poor young thing! she was a dis-

tant cousin of my own. Do you mind of her coming here for a day or two, many years ago—a wild sort of a lassie—Rachel Armstrong?"

" Armstrong — that was her maiden and married name too, then ? I heard your servant speak of her as *Mrs. Armstrong*."

" Her *married* name !—Well, God knows all ; but I think no human being ever will. We call her Mrs. Armstrong just to humour her. That's her delusion. She thinks she is married, and that her husband is abroad, though not one of her friends ever heard of any living soul courting or marrying Rachel Armstrong. She was too proud for her station. She frightened all the young farmers away."

" I wish you would tell me the whole story," said Ninian, sitting down and putting on what Tinie called " his W. S. face"—that is, his attentive, penetrating, business look.

“ The story is just this. Rachel was the daughter of a small Border farmer—a douce, ordinary sort of man. I suppose she was brought up much like the rest of farmers’ daughters in those parts—carelessly enough—for at thirteen I know she could scarcely read or write. Her father died then, and she was taken to live with some other of the Armstrongs. These people tell me she went on much as usual till she was seventeen, when she got a new whim; grew softened in her manners; tried to educate herself; and in a few years improved so, that my John, when he was in the Border country last, hardly knew his cousin Rachel. Since then, she took a brain fever—with over-much study the Armstrongs think—and she came out of it the poor daft lassie you see. The doctor says she may out-grow it, though most likely she’ll remain queer all her life. And she’s only two-and-twenty !”

“ And so, as you told me, her friends con-

signed her to you, and you are to have the interest of her little fortune for her maintenance?"

"It's just that, Mr. Græme. And surely I'll be kind to her, for she's a harmless, melancholy creature!"

"I would like to see her," said Ninian, thoughtfully.

"It will be of little use, for ever since she entered my doors, a month ago, she has not uttered a single word. She sits for hours looking at the sky, or twisting about a ring, that for some whim she has got on her wedding-finger."

"It may be really her wedding-ring."

"Impossible! for it was the guard of her mother's. Rachel must have had it for years. No, no," said Mrs. Forsyth, with the air of a woman who had thoroughly fixed her opinion, and will not be swerved therefrom, "it is utterly out of the question that Rachel Armstrong can have been really married—or—anything, perhaps worse. It's just her



romance that has turned her brain; for a time only perhaps, and then she'll come into her right mind."

"Let us hope so," answered Ninian. But further conversation was interrupted by the sudden appearance of the poor maniac. The harmless melancholy of which Mrs. Forsyth had spoken seemed to have all vanished; she entered the room with an excited look, as if seeking some one. She rushed up to Ninian, catching his arm, but when she saw his countenance her own changed to a look of blank disappointment. She uttered a sort of restless moan, and turned away.

"This is my friend, Mr. Ninian Græme. You will speak to him, will you not, Rachel?"

She shook her head, and went and sat down by the window, swaying to and fro in a sort of passive despair. A mournful wreck she was, but only as regarded the mind. Her youth and comeliness were still

retained. Ninian thought he had scarcely ever seen such a striking-looking woman. The shape of her head was magnificent. Her hair, of a deep dark-red auburn, somewhat coarse in texture, as that hue generally is, was rolled in heavy waves over her brow. And what a brow ! Smooth, broad, queenly, overshadowing the eyes, conveying the idea of mental power almost beyond a woman. Beneath were eyes such as always accompany this rare shade of hair—eyes of a warm, clear brown; not gleaming, but steady in light; lifted up with a sort of wonder-look, as if they saw what no other eyes could see; usually calm, but with such depths of passion in them, that you felt instinctively the soul which they reflected could be, as fate led, either that of a Clytie or a Clytemnestra. For the rest of the features, the nose was good; the mouth had little beauty. Yet all were spiritualised by the clear, perfectly colourless complexion — pallid, but still fair, and by those wonderful—wonderful eyes !



And yet she was mad ! For a moment Ninian could hardly bring himself to believe the fact. There was such a passionate intensity in her look, such a grace and womanly refinement about her dress and mien, quite different from the carelessness usually manifested by those hapless ones from whom Heaven has taken the light of reason. But very soon he saw that if not positively insane, there was in her mind some strange warp—some heavy numbing of the faculties. Her eye grew dull, her face blank and immovable, like a landscape from which the sun has faded away, leaving it all grey and dark.

“ It is no use speaking to her ; she will remain in this way for hours, sometimes. I cannot tell what roused her when you came in. She never before appeared so excited,” whispered Mrs. Forsyth.

“ I wonder,” said Ninian, pondering a little, and trying to put together, in his

clear-headed fashion, all the evidence he could muster, to test a belief that would linger in his mind—"I wonder if she mistook me for any one else, whom she is vaguely expecting?" And he remembered how he had first seen her, eagerly listening. Could it be, that the distant voice of himself or his companion had touched some strange chord in her wandering mind? But no—both Mr. Ulverston and himself were quite silent, except for those few words spoken at the gate. And the mere footsteps of strangers outside the wall could never have affected her thus.

"However," thought he, with lawyer-like precision, "I will leave no gound untried." So he began to speak aloud to Mrs. Forsyth concerning his morning's proceedings, mentioning several times distinctly, in the poor girl's hearing, the name of Ulverston. But though she paused a moment in her rocking at the sound of



Ninian's voice, and listened as if the tone were pleasant to her—it was indeed the kindest, most cheerful voice imaginable—still she gave no sign of interest or recognition. The blankness of her face never changed, but seemed rather to deepen. Ninian's wild, improbable conjecture—awakened by the many strange incidents of life which, during his professional career, he had seen—died away, as being utterly untenable. But an interest stronger than any which even his kind heart had ever known, was kindled there for poor Rachel Armstrong.

Before leaving, he determined to go and speak to her—if, perhaps, a stranger's notice might break her obstinate silence. “How must I call her, *Miss*, or *Mrs.*?” asked he of Mrs. Forsyth.

“*Mrs.*, by all means. The contrary only irritates her; and, considering her delusion, it sounds better to the servant. So we always speak of her as ‘Mrs. Armstrong’—the only

surname we can give her, since we know of no other.

Mr. Græme went up to the poor girl. "I am going now. You will shake hands with me, will you not? and another time we may be better friends."

Rachel lifted up her eyes with a sharp, childish expression of surprise; and scanned Ninian's face curiously. Apparently something there pleased or touched her, for she did not refuse to take his hand, though still her lips were as dumb as if no sound had stirred them since her birth.

He pursued his conversation, trying to make it both in words and manner such as he would address to any lady of mind and good breeding. Possibly this contrasted bitterly with the way in which the poor bewildered one was usually treated; or, perhaps, something in Ninian, or some fancy connected with him and his coming, caused to vibrate those hidden chords in her spirit, now

"Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh."

She let him talk on, looking at him the while, as if his very smile were soothing. She seemed at times as though about to speak, but never did speak, though more than once her lips moved and her eyes sought Ninian's with a look of piteous inquiry.

"Is there anything I can do for you—any books you would like to read?" he persisted kindly. She shook her head with a hopeless indifference. "At least you will allow me to see you, when I call again, will you not, Mrs. Armstrong?"

As Ninian spoke, her dull eyes kindled with reproach and anger. She set her teeth together, as if it needed more than even the obstinacy of insanity to maintain her self-imposed silence. But her uncontrollable passion would burst forth. She looked round a moment to see if any one were within hearing, and then, lifting herself up with great haughtiness, said,

"You mistake. Not Mrs. Armstrong—*Mrs. Sabine.*"

And then—the name she had forced herself to utter seeming to pierce her poor troubled brain like a trumpet-blast — she cried out with one long bitter cry, and fell into convulsions.

CHAPTER III.

EVERYBODY knows the horrors of a “flitting;” at least, everybody who belongs to that worthy, independent rank, our own good middle class—the ever-thrilling heart of the community, which continually sends its lifetide in vigour to the brain and in strength to the limbs; out of which our thinkers rise to guide, and our workers rise to rule. And to this sphere of the toilers and spinners belonged the Græme family. Every one of them laboured hard, with head and hands too, during the flitting, and the preparations towards the new house. For Ninian said that work was good; and thought—though he did not say—that it

would keep them all from sad, or fretful fancies concerning the change which must inevitably be felt in their way of life.

So now, for the first time, Edmund learned to pack up books as well as read them; and Reuben's mechanical skill was degraded from the making of electrical machines to the putting up of shelves. Lindsay and the twins devoted their whole energies to domestic arrangements; while Charlie's superabundant vivacity was made useful by his being kept in a perpetual state of locomotion for his sisters' benefit. As for pressing Tinie into the service, you might as well have tried to chain a sunbeam; but her light spirit interpenetrating the family mass, seemed to give vitality to the whole.

The few weeks passed; weeks that might have been sad, for in all change is some sadness, but were kept cheerful through continual occupation. And thus they made ready to leave the house where the old Professor had dwelt for fifteen long years.

“ You’ll not come home any more to this disorderly place, which I know keeps you in a continual fidget, though you never complain, brother,” said Tinie, running down stairs after Ninian, when, having helped in all the arrangements on the day of the flitting, he was leaving at last for his office. “ Certainly Miss Hope Ansted would have been shocked out of her proprieties and gentilities, if she had come last week as she proposed. If she would but stay out of the way till we get settled a little at The Gowans ——”

“ A week will do that. I wrote and fixed Saturday first for her coming,” said Ninian, rather lugubriously, as if resigning himself to a painful necessity.

“ Ah, now! suppose your ward turns out a nice little creature after all, and you make a pet of her, and like her better than Tinie? If you do, I’ll tell you what *I* will do. I’ll go and marry stupid Bailie Duncan, or solemn John Forsyth, or even that handsome, polite Englishman who called

the other day when you were out—Mr.—Mr. Ulverston.”

“Heaven forbid!” muttered Ninian. He hardly knew why, but it seemed intensely repugnant, the idea of one of his sisters marrying Mr. Ulverston. However, he smiled at his own folly and at Tinie’s too. “You goose of a lassie! as if your brother would let you leave him to marry anybody!” And he pulled the long curls that drooped over the balustrade. “Now good-by till tea-time at The Gowans.”

Just as he opened the door, Lindsay entered. She had been busy all day, in-doors and out, and looked wearied and pale. Ninian turned back with her into the little parlour, the only room in the house which was not yet dismantled. He went to get her some wine, and, returning, found her sitting in the old arm-chair, her face pressed against its cushions. Then he remembered how, years ago, he himself being quite a boy and the rest mere babes, when the children were all put to bed, his eldest

sister and a guest they often had, used to go and sit in this little room, talking for hours. He knew she was thinking of it now, and that she felt as none of them could feel, the pang of quitting a house which she was once to have left a bride, had not Heaven's will intervening made her for life a widow though unwed.

But these things were never spoken of now; so he only gave her the wine, talked cheerfully for a few minutes, and, departing, sent a private summons to Esther and Ruth, that "Our Sister" was to be watched over with especial care, lest she should over-fatigue herself.

Ninian was no sentimentalist; and the calm tenor of his life had never known a past—at least not such a past as Lindsay's. Perhaps he had had his dreams, as all young men have, but they were mere outward fancies—shadows floating round the untouched depths of his true heart. Thither the one Angel of life had never descended to trouble the waters

and depart, but even in departing to leave behind a healing power.

But Ninian Græme evidently meddled with none of these things. He looked like what he was—a contented, quiet-hearted man, plodding from home to office, and from office back to home, yet touched occasionally with keen sympathies from without, as he had been in the case of Rachel Armstrong. Her story, poor soul ! or such as there was of the same, had strongly interested him. Whenever he thought of it, his cheerful face became grave. And somehow he had lately got into the habit of thinking of it, on his walks to and from his office. Even on this day it haunted him, for he walked on in meditation so deep that he started like an accused criminal on hearing himself called.

“ Just in time to bid you good-by. Jump in, Græme, and see me to the railway,” cried Mr. Ulverston, out of a trunk-laden cab.

“ You are leaving us, then ?” And Ninian did not look by any means so surprised or regretful as politeness demanded. However, he good-naturedly joined his friend, or *acquaintance* he himself would perhaps have said, for Mr. Græme was particular in the minor truths of current phraseology.

They drove on to that nucleus where so many diverse phases of human life converge, and may be at leisure studied or moralised over—a railway terminus. They had to wait there some time, while the down-train from London disembogued itself of its various contents, ere Ulverston could start by the up-train, as he appeared in a great hurry to do. Meanwhile the two young men lounged up and down, conversing together and criticising the passers-by.

“ I thought you had already left. I have scarce seen anything of you since we were at Musselburgh,” said Ninian.

“ I’ve been out of town,” quickly answered the other. “ Edinburgh is horribly cold and

dreary now. By-the-by, speaking of your friends at Musselburgh, have you seen anything of Mr. Forsyth lately?"

"No," said Ninian, briefly; adding afterwards, "Did you like him so much, then?—would you have wished to meet him again? I could easily have managed it."

"Thank you, but you see I'm off now. Some other time.—By Jove! what a pretty face there is under that Quakerish bonnet," cried he, starting off, in his impulsive way, on a new tack, and forgetting everything else in his eagerness to stare at a plainly-dressed girl, who stood pensive and desolate amidst her luggage. Ninian was not the sort of young man to run wild after "pretty faces," so he just glanced that way, pitying the blank, frightened, helpless look that dulled the beauty of features which really merited Mr. Ulverston's notice. Perhaps, in his universal kindness, Mr. Græme might have come forward to offer help to the young creature, who seemed perfectly

bewildered with the confusion around her; but he saw that his companion had apparently the same intent, and drew back. However, the girl's good angel intervened in the shape of a railway porter, and she, with her possessions, was swept away towards a cab.

"Confound it!" cried Ulverston, laughing, but looking vexed. "However, I saw her name on her box; it is——"

Here the warning bell stopped all his revelations; and, bidding Ninian a hasty adieu, heaping upon him likewise those meaningless invitations—the mere I.O.U.'s of the moment, which nobody ever thinks of presenting for payment—Mr. Ulverston was whirled away southward.

His late companion could hardly be said to regret the parting; yet every good-by, even to an indifferent person, leaves a vague dulness behind—a sort of "Well, I wonder if we shall ever meet again, or how?" Feeling this, Ninian watched the last speck

of the train disappear. Then, finding it was too late to do any good in office-work that day, he lounged about a few minutes longer, and took the next train to Musselburgh.

All things there were as he had left them on his last weekly visit. For he had been with Mrs. Forsyth every week during the illness into which Rachel Armstrong had sunk: Rachel Armstrong she was still called: Ninian thought he had no right to reveal to any one the name which he, and he only, had heard her utter. But many a time he wearied himself in vain conjectures, and nothing could make him believe that she was really so mad as Mrs. Forsyth thought. Eagerly now, as at every visit, he asked, "If there was any change?"

"None. She just holds her tongue, except for a few words now and then to me. Always kindly, too, poor lassie! She's never sulky as she used to be. Still, I can't get anything out of her, though Bell

says that half the night through she's at her havers, muttering to herself."

"Does she look composed?"

"You may see, for we brought her down to the little drawing-room close by. Hark! she's speaking to Bell now."

It was in a quiet tone, perfectly self-possessed—the voice one of those low rich voices, laden with the burden of a full heart, which we always recognise, and feel its influence we know not why.

Bell came in most *à propos* to explain that the poor lady had been saying she wished to see Mr. Græme, whom she had watched from the window. She always sat watching at the window, morn, noon, and eve. It was the sole fancy remaining of all her "strange ways," Mrs. Forsyth said; in everything else, save her continual apathetic silence and melancholy, Rachel conducted herself like a reasonable woman.

"I am glad she wants to see you, for I had talked a great deal to her about you.

Though, generally, she doesn't care to see anybody, not even John," said the mother, to whom the last circumstance was the climax of all peculiarity.

Ninian went in to see the poor maniac who had interested him so much. But nothing of madness was there about her now. Worn by her long illness—her usual pallid complexion grown almost death-like, her eyes larger and more "wonderful" than ever—still greater than the outward change was the inward change of the mind. He saw in a moment that there was reason in that face—faint, perhaps, and still obscured at intervals, but it was there. And the difference it wrought, showed Ninian yet more clearly that she had indeed been really mad. Then, all the fantasies of her brain must have been delusions too. Recollecting this, he resolved not to address her by the name of Sabine, or indeed by any name at all.

"I am glad to see you so much better."

He could not say any more than this, so touched was he by the expression of the pale passive face, which tried to smile, and failed, as if smiles belonged to a past life, and not to that sphere of being in which this forlorn one had darkly dwelt so long. The sound of Ninian's voice seemed to call up some phantoms, yet unlaid, from the dreamy caverns of her brain; for she drew her hands across her eyes, saying,

“Yes; I have been very ill; and things are still confused a little, here.”

“Would you like me to come another day, when you are stronger?”

“No, no! I wanted you. Ay, I remember. Will you be seated, Mr. Græme.” And now, the shadow being past, her eyes shone with a cold clear light, and her manner took a composed dignity which perfectly astonished Ninian. There was something even queen-like in her attitude and mien, as, gathering her white draperies round her, she leaned back in her arm-chair. It reminded him of Queen Katherine—for Ninian, though

no genius, was a man of reading, and loved Shakspeare. Now, in the want of general conversation, he ventured to make the remark.

She started—one of her quick wild looks came, and faded. “Ah, indeed! So you read Shakspeare—as I did, once. Well, perhaps, we do look like that scene, in ‘King Henry VIII.’ is it not? You are Griffiths, and here is my kind Patience”—she turned affectionately to Mrs. Forsyth—“I, the poor Queen Katherine.” And in a voice of deep pathos she repeated—half to herself as it were—the speech beginning,

“Would I had never trod this English earth,
Nor felt the flatteries that do grow upon it!
Ye have angels’ faces, but Heaven knows your hearts—”

Here she stopped abruptly—“No—not that—I never meant that. How dares any one say I am like Queen Katherine?”

“My dear—my poor Rachel!” interposed Mrs. Forsyth, alarmed at the almost threatening gleam of the girl’s eyes. “Come, don’t go back to this play-acting and foolish-

ness, which they told me about—I'm sure it was that which was too much for your poor brain."

"Hush — hush," said Ninian, warningly; for he saw that though Rachel spoke no more, the dark shadows of madness, so lately banished, came flitting over her countenance. He changed the conversation; and prevented Mrs. Forsyth's kind but ill-judged officiousness from chafing this poor troubled spirit, until at last the good woman quitted the room.

Then Rachel, who had been leaning back in her usual apathetic way, suddenly grasped his arm, whispering in a tone agitated indeed, but perfectly sane :

"You are kind: I understand you. I am not mad, as they think; but I have been so. Yes; I know I have been mad. It was no wonder."

"Why?"

"I can't tell you; I will not—must not. It is a secret. But I shall hear some day —I know I shall. I fully thought—that day

I listened to you in the garden — What made you come there? And—and——" Her whole face quivered with eagerness— "Was there anybody with you?"

"Yes, an acquaintance of mine, Mr. Ulverston."

"Ah!" She sunk back with a long, long sigh.

"Did you know Mr. Ulverston?"

"Oh, no, no! Don't talk about him," she added, restlessly; "it does not interest me. I never heard the name." And she closed her eyes, sighing once again, so bitterly!

Mrs. Forsyth's heavy footstep was heard on the stairs. Rachel roused herself, clasped Ninian's arm till her long slender fingers felt like rings of iron, and whispered,

"Before she comes back, listen. You remember once I uttered a name? That was a great sin, because I had promised not. I never shall utter it more, until——" Here her countenance looked heavenly with its momentary rapture. "Therefore, Mr.

Græme, if you have any recollection of that name——”

“ It is, and always will be, as though I had never heard it,” said Ninian, firmly. “ Be satisfied; all is safe.”

She cast upon him a look of wild gratitude; nay, she even snatched and kissed his hand. Mr. Græme felt quite uncomfortable: he did not understand the romantic impulses of such a creature as Rachel Armstrong. But in walking homeward—for he had left as soon as Mrs. Forsyth returned to the room—he pondered over the matter, and his common sense told him it was nothing but what might have been expected from such a youth as hers had been. Entirely shut out from the world, her mind had evidently formed itself from the struggling life within, aided by some single influence from without. But whether her mysteries were, as Mrs. Forsyth implied, only “ play-acting,” or whether they were indeed reality, Ninian could

not satisfy himself. He felt a relief when he passed from the excitement which seemed an atmosphere ever surrounding poor Rachel Armstrong, into the serener airs which breathed around his own fireside.

It was a clear starry wintry night, as he walked up the little avenue which led to The Gowans ; for the house boasted an avenue, a lawn, and a garden, though all had long lain in a state of desolation. One would hardly believe there was such a solitary old-fashioned place so near the centre of a city like Edinburgh. Ninian, who had a fancy for all quaint, quiet nooks, scanned his new home, and gloried in it.

All was so still and deserted, it might have been Hood's immortal " Haunted House," but for dim rays of light that came through cracked window-shutters, showing for certain that the ghosts were holding revelry. Ninian walked in, smiling to think that his family had already become so ru-

ralised as to keep unlatched doors; and there, with the light snow lying in white sparkles on his hat, coat, and hair, he stood before them—an apparition of delight.

For, jumping round him like very children, came Tinie, Edmund, and Charlie. Oh, brother, we have been waiting for you a whole hour, because—because ——”

Here Ninian's quick eye glancing over the circle, discovered one addition—a girl, very small, and childish-looking, who rose from her seat in the corner, and curtsied with an air decidedly prim. Mr. Græme bowed ; and there they stood, until Tinie's merry laugh broke the awkward pause.

“ Oh, what fun ! Here's a surprise ! It was so to us at first ; but she has been three hours in the house, and we've found out we need not have been afraid of her in the least. Guess, brother—guess who she is.”

“ Tinie,” said Esther, as the stranger began to colour, and Ninian to look rather uncomfortable ; “ Tinie, I'm ashamed of you.

Why can't you say at once that it is Miss Ansted?"

"—Who mistook the date you fixed, and has come a week too soon; but not too soon for our cordial welcome," added Lindsay, kindly.

Hope Ansted curtsied once more—to Miss Græme this time—and then, touching Ninian's offered hand with the tips of her fingers, subsided into her old corner, guarded on either side by the twins, who, shy themselves, seemed unaccountably to sympathise with this—the shyest young lady that ever was known.

Ninian, perfectly confounded at the appearance of his ward in a character the very opposite of what they all expected, took the earliest opportunity of stealing apart with Tinie.

"Did you ever see such a girl!" broke out the voluble 'pet of the family.' "And an English girl, too, who has lived all her life in London. I'm sure she looks as if she had never been outside the walls of her boarding-

school. Every sentence she speaks—and she has not spoken a dozen—she brings in something about ‘Mrs. Watson Jones.’ And at the mere name she looks round as if Mrs. Watson Jones, or her ghost, stood behind. Poor thing ! I’m sure she has been frightened out of her seven senses, and all the spirit crushed out of her. Her very face shows that.”

“ Probably so,” said Ninian. He was thinking that somewhere or other he had seen the face before.

“ It’s a pretty face, too,” Tinie went on ; “ only there’s no life in it. And she’s not a bad figure, but for that odious brown merino dress, and white linen collar. I hate linen collars ; don’t you, brother ?”

“ How should I judge ?” answered Ninian, smiling. He had all at once recollected where he had seen that fair, still face, with the down-cast eyes. It was the same which Mr. Ulverston had so rudely stared at when they were at the railway terminus. He determined not to allude to the fact, as pro-

bably such a very, very quiet girl had never noticed either him or his companion ; of whose companionship on this occasion Mr. Græme did not feel altogether proud.

“ She seems quite a child, too ; is scarcely seventeen—for we asked her. And yet she has such a prim, old-fashioned air about her. She'll turn us all into icicles. I don't know how we will manage to get on together !” continued Tinie, in such a comical despair that her brother was quite amused.

“ Well, my *wee thing*”—*wee thing* was one of Tinie's pet names—“ we must all do the best we can with her, making allowances for her manners and education.”

“ Education ! Why, she can't speak the Queen's English correctly ! She drops her *h's* sometimes.”

“ Then we'll teach her better. And we must remember what a dreary life she has led ; her father abroad—with no mother, or sisters, or elder brothers.”

“ No elder brother—ah, Ninian !” murmured Tinie, lovingly pressing close to him ;

then adding, in her wilful way, "Hurrah for Mr. Græme of The Gowans, guardian, schoolmaster, and general philanthropist!"

"Hush!" said Ninian, laughing. But his little fairy of a sister had put him into such a good humour, that when he re-entered the parlour he looked quite radiant and handsome. At least so Tinie declared, and was wicked enough to ask the shy guest if she did not think so? Whereupon Hope Ansted lifted her great eyes, dropped them again, pursed her lips, and said nothing. She was evidently terribly afraid of Mr. Græme.

The whole family tried to amuse and encourage her — all except Reuben, from whose stern woman-hating cynicism, no civility was ever expected. Edmund ventured a few remarks of a poetical nature, but found that she had, as he expressed it, "no soul;" so contented himself with a cold admiration of her beautiful nose and mouth. Tinie attacked her with fun and harmless jokes, but she never laughed,

and looked quite shocked sometimes.. She only seemed to feel at ease with the twins and their Berlin work, which, she said, "she was very fond of at school." So she buried herself among wools and patterns; under which salutary influence her hands unbent from their frigid fold on her lap, and once or twice she was heard to speak in a very precise and timid way. But this was only when the rest were talking so loud that nobody listened, save Ninian; and when she unfortunately caught his eye, she once more grew formal and frightened. In fact, the whole family soon set down Hope Ansted as a common-place school-girl; which was, indeed, the sole character she could lay claim to—except on account of her beauty, then only dawning, and probably visible but to few eyes.

The evening passed somewhat heavily; after a time, the young Græmes fairly grew tired of amusing their guest, and left her alone. Ninian tried to address some few remarks to her, but her mind was appa-

rently so unformed, or so dull, that even he gave her up in despair; until at last, bidding her good-night, he did so with a cheerful air.

“ You must try to consider yourself quite like one of the children here; but I dare say you feel strange at first.”

“ Yes—and no doubt you are quite alarmed at our brother,” added Tinie, hurrying Miss Ansted through the hall; “ isn’t he a grave, formal creature—the darling! Everybody thinks him solemn as a judge the first time of seeing him. Did you?”

“ I had seen him before,” said Hope, a faint smile creeping in at the corners of her mouth.

“ Where—where?” And all the girls clustered round her.

“ At the railway this afternoon. He had with him a gentleman.”

“ What sort of a gentleman?”

“ Very handsome; the handsomest I ever saw, with such a beautiful fair moustache!”

“ Well,” cried Tinie, bounding back to

the parlour in a hearty fit of laughter; “ our demure little maiden has found her tongue, and her eyes too ; she has just been telling us how she met you, brother Ninian, and with you a gentleman, ‘ the handsomest she ever saw.’ ”

“ Mr. Ulverston again !” thought Ninian. But he only said, “ Indeed !” patted Tinie’s shoulder, and told her to run away to bed.

CHAPTER IV.

“ You’LL come with us to hear Mr. Forsyth preach to-night before he leaves for his manse in the Highlands ?” said Ninian to Miss Ansted.

“ Yes,” answered Hope, who in the course of a few weeks had learned to do everything that Mr. Græme desired her. In fact, she was one of those malleable characters who are subject to any one’s bidding. A thread guided her, as if it were a thread of love. In the genial atmosphere of The Gowans, the poor frozen plant had woke up to a faint life—as Edmund expressed it in a sonnet he wrote—which seemed as if he were trembling on the verge of falling in love with her. But he changed his mind, and didn’t.

They all went to hear Mr. Forsyth. It

was at a small town some miles distant from Edinburgh—the town where the young minister was born. He had never yet preached there, as Ninian explained to Miss Ansted on their way thither. For Mr. Græme always tried to talk to his ward, and draw out what little mind he supposed she had; and sometimes it gave him pleasure to see a faint ray of interest in her beautiful but childish face. He told her the whole story of John Forsyth: how he had risen from the lowest estate of a poor man's son, toiling step by step with indomitable perseverance, until he was able to study for the ministry. How when the spirit of his great calling entered into him, that which was at first ambition, grew into the higher feeling of devotion to the cause whereto he had been sanctified; so that now he was about to give up all his prospects as an eloquent and promising preacher, to become a poor labourer in his master's far vineyard.

“Is not this great and good?” said Ninian at last, turning to his silent companion, whom

he had almost forgotten in the enthusiasm of talking about his friend.

Hope Ansted said nothing, but there came a sweet thoughtfulness into her childish eyes, and she looked up at Mr. Graeme as if she felt that he, at least, was "great and good." Tinie, who had her brother's other arm, did the same. And Ninian, glancing down upon their young faces, smiled as if they were two pet children growing up under his care.

They entered the church, a large grey building. It was crowded with people, who came from all the country round to hear the young minister who had once been a "bit laddie" among them. Many of them were whispering—even talking aloud—a custom not unfrequent in a Scottish kirk, though seeming to southern ears strangely inconsistent in such a devout and religious land. All their talk was about John Forsyth, and many an eye was turned to where his mother sat. By her side was a strange lady.

“ Is that Rachel Armstrong ?” whispered Miss Græme, who had learnt from Mrs. Forsyth the supposed history of the girl.

It was Rachel. She might be known by the carriage of her head: so stately, so different from every other woman there.

“ She must be quite herself now,” Ninian said. “ You shall speak to her after the sermon. You might do her good, Lindsay, as you do to every one.”

“ Hush !” Our Sister answered, with her soft smile; for now there came a pause over the murmuring assembly, who immediately fell into the silence befitting a religious service.

John Forsyth stood, a minister, in the church where he had worshipped as a child. He was still a very young man, and seemed younger even than he was, from his fair complexion and hair. There was something pure and saint-like in his whole mien. You felt at once that he had been rightly named John, and that the Divine Apostle’s spirit was dwelling in him.

He prayed silently for a few moments; then stood up, and met the one fixed gaze of that thronged mass of people—his own people, too, his friends and his brethren. He had come to be a prophet in his own country. It was a moment that might well have dazzled the senses of the young minister, and brought in worldly thoughts and worldly pride between him and his vow. He looked very pale, and for the first few words his voice was inaudible. Afterwards it gained strength, and he read the opening hymn in a clear impressive tone.

The tune was "*Martyrdom*."—A few weak notes from the precenter—and then it rose up from the vast congregation in a whirlwind of sound, filling the whole church, rolling, wave after wave, in something higher, diviner than mere melody. The poor old precenter's voice was drowned in that ocean of song. Verse after verse it swelled and sank, all individual discords being lost in its great harmonious flood, until it seemed a fitting type of that infinite Company, which, gathered from all

the ends of the earth, shall one day be heard
“praising God with a loud voice.”

The hymn ceased; there was a silence, reminding one of the “silence in heaven,” spoken of in the Revelations; and then the young minister began his prayer. Ninian saw how the mother, unable to stand, sat with her withered hands trembling; his own sisters were deeply touched; Lindsay more than all, for *he* who long since had prayed his last prayer on earth, had also been a minister. Rachel Armstrong alone remained unmoved, standing fixedly looking forward. Ninian turned towards Hope Ansted, who, startled and affected by this scene, to her so strange, had knelt down in her English fashion, her hands half covering her face. He thought what a gentle, girlish face it was, and how different from Rachel’s stern beauty. These thoughts were, however, but the flashes of a moment, ere he tried to cast them all aside, and lift his heart where alone it ought to be lifted at such a time and place.

The service was long; but it was one that might never be forgotten in the town where John Forsyth was born. At its close, people forgot to argue, as Scotch congregations will always do, concerning the sermon; they only spoke of the man—the young preacher—who was going forth from among them all, to enter on the work of Heaven.

“And Heaven will prosper it, my dear John,” said Ninian, earnestly, as he clasped his old companion’s hand, when, the congregation having dispersed, the Græmes and Forsyths met. Mr. Forsyth stood, with his mother on his arm and his cousin beside him. His fair cheek was a little flushed, but his manner was composed and serene. It only changed when Ninian came and spoke to Mrs. Armstrong.

“You are quite well now, I hope? I am so glad to see you here. You, too, must feel rejoiced and proud this day.”

“I?” she said, listlessly. “Oh! because of my cousin John. I have little

interest in those things, but John asked me, so I came."

" You ought, indeed, Rachel, for you know how anxious John has been about you, always; I think you might be more pleased than you seem," interposed the mother rather fretfully.

" Hush, mother!" said Mr. Forsyth, as he walked aside, and spoke to Lindsay Græme.

The two families stood together for a good while, talking in the aisle of the church. It was a soft spring evening, and as the lights were put out within the building, the moonshine entered from without, giving to all their faces a spectral, shadowy, look. Especially to that of Rachel, who walked restlessly up and down, scarcely speaking to any one except Edmund, by whose boyish countenance she had seemed attracted and pleased.

" Do you think she is quite right here now?" whispered the old lady to Mr. Græme, with a mysterious finger on her forehead.

“John thinks she is; she never alludes to her fantastic notions, and my son will have it that she was never mad at all, only queer from the fever she had. John is so anxious about her.”

“I see that,” answered Ninian, rather sadly, as he noticed that his friend, though talking with Lindsay and the others, continually glanced towards Rachel, with that restless look which often so mournfully tells how to the gazer the whole world is becoming filled with one human presence. “Does Mrs. Armstrong go out at all?” he asked. “Would she come and see my sisters? We have, or try to have, a merry house at The Gowans, for the sake of this English girl who is living with us.”

“Miss Ansted? Oh, yes, John was speaking of her: a shy, quiet, rather stupid little thing.”

“Nay—not stupid.”

“Well, but about this visit. Rachel, my dear, Mr. Græme is inviting you to The Gowans. It would do you good, and cheer

up your spirits," said Mrs. Forsyth, in a soothing, patronising tone, that evidently galled poor Rachel beyond endurance.

She said, sharply, "I will not go;" and turned again to Edmund.

But some time after, when they were all quitting the church, she suddenly changed her mind, and said to Lindsay, who had been talking with her, "Miss Græme, I should like to go home with you. It is a week-day evening, though it seems like Sunday, so my cousin cannot object."

"Oh, no," cried the delighted Mrs. Forsyth, "and John shall come and fetch you home."

"By no means; this boy will be my true knight." And taking Edmund's arm—he seeming divided between the indignity of being called "this boy," and the pleasure of being noticed by a lady of such fair and graceful presence—Rachel Armstrong went forward, and distanced them all.

Ninian, with Hope Ansted, walked along beside John Forsyth and his mother. The

old lady talked eagerly of her son's plans, and of the wild northern region whither he was going.

"And you are satisfied and glad to go?" his friend asked.

"Yes," said Forsyth, and his countenance resumed the serene St. John-like aspect which it had lost in Rachel's presence. "I think above all things one ought to set one's duty, and this seems mine. To be sure, it will be dreary at first, for my mother stays behind, and I hear the manse is a desolate place; but in time—in time, it may grow cheerful."

"When he has a wife and bairns," whispered Tinie to Hope Ansted: "Why don't you try for the vacant office? you'd make a capital minister's wife."

Hope looked timidly at her guardian, then cast her eyes down, and said, "she never thought of such things."

It was nine o'clock before they reached The Gowans: a mild, still night, so bright that they could see the little crocuses and

snowdrops peeping up from under the leafless bushes. Edmund went and brought some to Mrs. Armstrong. She took them with an almost childish pleasure, looked at them until her eyes grew heavy with a trouble that would not rain itself out in tears.

“It is a long, long time since any one has brought me flowers,” said she, in a broken voice; and then, during all tea-time, she sat still and scarcely spoke.

The evening amusements of the circle went on much as usual, for so Ninian and Lindsay had agreed would be best. None took much notice of their new visitor, except Edmund, who kept near her, and seemed to read her strange pale face with all his boyish soul. After supper, the girls, with Hope Ansted, sat and worked; while Charlie learnt his lessons, and Reuben, in despair of other entertainment, took out his electrical machine, and began to electrify the cat. Soon the circle gathered round him, and peals of laughter, even from the quiet Hope Ansted,



testified to the pleasant family fun that continually lighted up The Gowans.

“I wish I were a child—I wish I were a child!” muttered Rachel Armstrong; while fitful shadows, sometimes of mirth, sometimes of bitterness, came and went over her features, as she sat and watched “the children.”

“Wherefore?” said Ninian.

He in his turn had been watching her.

“Because—nay, I cannot tell, but I want to be a child. I want to laugh and be merry. I am so young, and yet life seems so long—so dull. Couldn’t you tell me what I must do? And with a sorrowful entreaty she looked up at Ninian.

There was in him a something to which every one instinctively came for help.

“How do you mean?”

“I scarcely know, only that my mind is so restless, and yours seems ever so quiet and good. Mrs. Forsyth chafes me, kind though she is; but you always make me feel calm and at rest. Couldn’t you help

me—couldn't you think of something to make the days pass quicker during this weary, weary waiting?"

"Waiting for what?"

She pressed her lips together angrily.

"I will not tell you. Nay, do not look at me so, as if your eyes would force out the truth. I cannot tell a falsehood, but I can keep silence." And her former excited manner came back, though she struggled hard to keep it down.

It was touching to see how the still perturbed mind, as if conscious of the chaos that had been, strove to control itself, and guide its wandering fancies into the light of reason.

"Another time, Mrs. Armstrong," said Ninian, gently—"another time we will have a long talk together, and I will tell you what I think would amuse and occupy you. Study, for instance. My sisters study every night, though they are nearly as old as you are; but, I think, not so well educated."

"You consider me well educated, then?"



eagerly cried Rachel. "There is nothing in me very ignorant, or low, or repulsive, is there? — You are quite sure of that? Though I was—yes I was—a mean farmer's daughter."

"That excites my wonder," Ninian answered, in his frank way. "I was aware in what a lowly estate you were born. You need not be ashamed of that, you know, but rather proud in having conquered all hindrances, and become the woman that I feel you are; without compliment—a woman of cultivated mind, and as true a *lady* as any I know. However you contrived to attain all this is a mystery."

"Ah! is it—is it?"

Her eyes literally gleamed; whether with pride, or joy, or—Yes, it was something greater than both; the only light which, shining from a human face, however plain, glorifies it into a beauty almost divine.

"You must have had an intense thirst for knowledge," Ninian continued, "and an

energy of will almost marvellous in a woman, considering the sort of people among whom you lived."

"They were brute beasts, and I was one of them!" cried Rachel. "Ah! you should have known me in those days! I was plain—I was coarse. If you had seen these hands, brown and rough with labour—" And she stretched out a hand and arm, large, but beautiful in form and colour. "Nay, worse than all, if you had looked into my heart and mind, both as blank and dark as a winter's night, thrilled with distant storms. For I was stormy, too. When my passions rose I could do anything—anything! And I had no counsellor to rule me, no intellect or education to guide me. Oh, what a creature I was!"

She said this, as if she took pleasure in hurling disdain upon her olden self; though in speaking that strangely proud, defiant, yet rapturous smile was never absent from her face.

“In truth,” said Ninian, “you have cause to take pride in what you have accomplished.”

“I take pride!” she repeated. “Yes, I am proud, and glad too; but not for myself.” And the softness and womanliness of her voice and mien were such as Ninian had never before seen there.

“I do not quite understand you,” said he at last, rousing her from a dreamy silence into which she had fallen.

Mrs. Armstrong seemed to recollect herself, and became reserved immediately.

“Understand me? There is nothing to be understood, except that I was such and such a girl as I described, and I have made myself the woman you see. How I stand in you fair graces, surely I ought not to be so vain as to inquire.”

She laughed—almost the first time that Ninian had ever heard her laugh.

“I am most glad to see you so cheerful,” he answered, with warm sincerity; “and

some day you must tell me how and why you did all this."

"How and why! That would be a long, long story, Mr. Græme," she said, and some silent thought sat smiling in her eyes. "But we will talk as much as you please. I like to talk to you, it does me good; it brings back the old, old life——"

She paused abruptly, and broke the conversation by walking to one of the windows where Edmund stood.

"You dreamy boy! so you like to watch the moon," cried Rachel, touching him on the shoulder, at which he started sensitively. "Nay, never blush; I did the same myself at your age. We, every one of us, do the like in our turn, do we not, Mr. Græme? After all, 'tis a happy time of life, that of your brother, here. What is his name?"

"Edmund," said Ninian, who had followed to the window.

"Edmund Geoffrey," said the boy him-

self, who was very proud of being named after the father of English poetry.

“Geoffrey! Are you named Geoffrey?” She drew in her breath, and changed colour for a moment. “That is well—it is a good name. I shall always call you Geoffrey, if I may?”

Edmund smiled a glad consent.

She touched the boy’s shoulder with her hand. “You are tall—almost as tall as—Ah, well! do you think it is quite fair for a laddie like you to tower above me, who am no small woman, either? What a man you will grow to—tall and strong! Your arm feels so firm, too; and just the same height as—I told you before that I liked walking with you—Geoffrey.” She paused over the name; uttered it softly, in a changed tone; half-sighed; and then, still leaning on the boy’s arm, she stood, her head turned away, watching the moonlight.

“Come, if you will grow so sentimental, you had better take refuge in my study,” said Ninian, somewhat amused, but glad to

see that the forlorn Rachel had at last found an interest, and perhaps feeling a sense of brotherly pride in her liking for his favourite Edmund, who, though contemned at times, was always secretly respected as the genius of the family. “See, the children are all beginning blindman’s buff, or some such awful game. Suppose we three make our escape. I have writing to do ; but Edmund can show you his books. You can’t think what a student he is,” Mrs. Armstrong, said the good elder brother, as he led the way to a little low room, where there was a solitary light “dimly burning.”

Here, very soon, Ninian settled himself at his papers, for he had to work hard—how hard none but himself knew—to keep “the wolf from the door” of his large household. But he did it cheerfully—he loved them all so much. Even now, at intervals, he forgot his work, to look up with fraternal pleasure at Edmund’s kindling face, as the boy, quite in his element, talked to Rachel Armstrong of his favourite studies, and the books he

loved. Her conversation led him on—(and Ninian was surprised to find how brilliant and full of both knowledge and feeling Rachel's conversation was)—he brightened up, and there was an energy and fire in his whole mien that might well have charmed her—as it evidently did.

“Go on; I like to hear you talk,” Ninian heard her say to the boy, as they held between them a volume of Chaucer, and were deeply discussing ‘Griseldis’ and ‘The Flower and the Leaf.’ “Or, for a change, suppose you were to come and read aloud. Reading used to be so pleasant to me—so pleasant!” And she shaded her eyes with her hand.

Edmund was all delight. He brought an arm-chair for her, and a low seat for himself.

“No; change places—it is my whim,” said Rachel, smiling. “Poets, or readers of poets, should surely have the upper seats;—I will be the humble listener. Well, what book have you chosen?”

“Coleridge. Shall it be the ‘Ancient Mariner,’ or ‘Kubla Khan,’ or——”

“Whatever you love best. I loved all—once. It is long, very long, since I have read or thought of poetry.” She sat down, leaning her elbow on her knees, and looking straightforward into the fire. Ninian thought he saw shadows, heavy and dark, crossing her face, which was only visible now and then, in the glimmer of the fire-light.

The boy read on; he had a pleasant voice, and felt what he read. There might have been faults, for a truly good reader is about as rare as a truly great poet; but there was that heart-modulation—the echo which lofty poetry ever finds in a nature “yet unspotted from the world.” Ah! however we may mock at this in maturer years, calling it sentimental folly, we all feel in our inmost souls that it was *true*—true as love, or death, or the world to come, and all the other awful realities that we sometimes learn to scoff or smile at aside, because we dare not look them in the face. Ay, we may scoff and we may smile for a time, at these dreams of our romantic youth; but when in the calmness of

age all things grow clearer to our view, we acknowledge, with a pensive tenderness, that they were happy and heavenly dreams after all.

Rachel sat listening to the boy. Sometimes she looked at him, but not often; she apparently liked best to listen and not look. When he ceased, she started as if from a reverie.

“Go on; read some more. I was very fond of being read to—once.” Her lips smiled; but in her eyes was a light sadness; the momentary shadow that always comes over us when we say, “*I was*.”

“I will read you my favourite, ‘Genevieve,’ ” answered Edmund.

“Ay, do; for I love it—I love it!” she said, her eyes shining with the rare expression that lit them at times, and made their cold crystal depths all ablaze with some inward warmth and glory. “I’ll tell you,” she added, laying her hand on the boy’s knee,—“I’ll tell you how I first heard ‘Genevieve.’ It was when I was quite a girl;

four, five years since. What a long time five years seems ! Well, well ! I am not now what I was then ! ” And she tossed back her head with a smiling, graceful pride. “ But what was I telling you ? I forget.”

“ About the poem, and where you read it.”

“ *Heard* it ; I never read in those days. It was on a moonlight night—a harvest-moon,—I remember ; for our *kirn* had been held the week before. Ah ! that *kirn* ! ” She paused, but soon went on : “ Well, as I said, it was moonlight. Now I was an ignorant, stupid girl—so everybody told me ; but I sometimes had strange fancies on moonlight nights and sunsets, or when I was alone ; and I had lately begun to gather up my thoughts, wishing I were not so ignorant and foolish.”

“ How could that be ? What made you imagine yourself so ? ” asked Edmund, with great simplicity.

“ Look you,” said Rachel, earnestly ; “ if you were sitting in the dark, with foul things all round you, and yourself poor, and blind, and miserable,—but yet not feeling this,

since you had never known anything higher; if, then, there came and stood an angel in your sight, scarcely looking at you, only standing there,—perhaps once turning towards you with a sort of compassionate interest, nothing more; but still standing there, continually filling you with the light of his presence, showing all things black beside him, showing you above all *yourself*—so mean, so lowly, so vile,—until you longed to tear off the rags you had thought fine garments, and be clothed like him—until you felt happy if you could only crawl near enough to breathe the same air he made so pure and glorious; and—— But how I run on," said Rachel, pausing abruptly as she saw Edmund's look of utter astonishment. " You romantic boy ! you have made me as poetical and nonsensical as *yourself*. Was not that a grand apologue I was telling you?"

" I thought you were to tell me about ' Genevieve.' "

" Well ; and I will. So, for the third time, I begin: ' It was a moonlight night ! ' I

was walking near the ruins of an old castle,—I and—one who condescended to teach me sometimes. We were talking of our Border ballads, the only poetry I knew. He said——”

“ Your master ?”

“ My master ?” The proud woman’s head was raised, then sunk again humbly, even smilingly. “ Yes, he was my master.”

“ And what was it he said ?”

“ Something—I forgot. But it was there, from him, that I first heard ‘ Genevieve.’ ”

“ What a strange fancy for an old village schoolmaster !”

Rachel laughed—the sweet low laughter with which we mask some pleasant secret that lurks behind.

“ Ah, but you’re a wonderfu’ laddie !” cried she, falling into the broad intonation which marked her humble birth, and which at times peeped out, though in general she spoke with an accent remarkably pure, and was never betrayed into a provincialism that she did not carefully correct immediately.

“Come, Geoffrey,” she said, “read some more, if you are not wearied of me and my little sketches of autobiography.”

“Never! I wish you would tell me your whole story from the beginning. It must have been something strange, for your face and manner are strange too—different from any lady I ever knew.”

“How so? Do you see anything unlike a lady in me?” she said, with an anxiety quite incomprehensible. “I know I am utterly ignorant of the world—as ignorant as a child. He said so; but he liked me for that.”

“Who liked you?”

“Oh—the—thej ‘village schoolmaster’ you spoke of,” said Rachel, with her old smile. “He lent me books, I being just a poor girl, and he a kind-hearted man; and so I became less ignorant—less unworthy. I could not make myself into a lady—a modern lady, for I had never seen one; but I tried to be like one of Shakespeare’s women, or Spenser’s, or Walter

Scott's. And when, after two or three years, my—that is, my master, as you say—came back, he was—not displeased with me!"

"How could he, indeed!" cried Edmund, with enthusiasm. "The kind, worthy man; how he must have loved you!"

"He did—he did," Rachel murmured, and her whole being seemed to dilate with a rapturous pride. "Mean as I had been, lowly as I then was, and am, compared to him, still he did love me. Nothing shall ever take that belief from me—nothing!" Though her words were resolute, they seemed those of one fighting with a vague trouble. Turning round, she saw Ninian's eyes fixed upon her; she drew back, and her cheek flushed less in shame than anger. "I hope you have been amused, Mr. Græme, by the nonsense I have been talking to this boy. You have heard it all, of course?"

"I have."

"Well, what do you think of it and of me?" she asked, defiantly.

"Nothing but what adds to your honour,

and to my sympathy ; nothing that I did not already dimly guess before," he said, in a low voice, as he went out of the room.

" Why do you tremble ?" cried Edmund, watching her ; indeed, he had scarcely ever taken his gaze off boyish admiration from her face. " Sit down again—let me call Our Sister to you."

" No ; I am only tired. It is late—I will go home."

" Then I will get ready to go with you, Mrs. Armstrong."

" *Mrs. Armstrong !* You shall not call me so," she said, sharply ; " it is an ugly name—I like Rachel best. You may, if you like, say ' Rachel,' and I will say ' Geoffrey.' " She paused over the name, as she ever did, uttering it with an intonation softer and sweeter than any other word. " Now, my boy, away ! I will wait here, and then we can slip out quietly. I do not want to go among your sisters again ; they are so merry —so merry ! and I—— Well, 'tis nothing —nothing."

She sat down once more on the stool before the fire, wrapping her arms on her knee and laying her head upon them. For a long time she remained motionless and silent; then murmured :

“ It is hard—very hard ! Oh, Geoffrey, Geoffrey—how long—”

“ Did you call me ? ” said Edmund, eagerly. He had just come in with his brother and John Forsyth.

“ Call *you* ? ” She sprang up and saw the three. Her flushed face struggled into quietude—she tried to assume the somewhat stately manner she at times affected, in which the innate refinement of her mind struggled with the formality used to cloak her old plebeian ways. But there was a tremor and restlessness about her all the while.

“ I did not expect *you*, cousin John. I wished this boy to be my escort.”

“ Nevertheless, my mother and I could not rest contented. You are not angry that I came ? ” said the young minister humbly, while a vague look of disappoint-

ment troubled his face, else so saintlike and boyish-fair. As he stood by Rachel Armstrong, there appeared between them that strange contrast which Nature sometimes fantastically wills, putting the man's nature into the woman, and the woman's in the man. Out of these elements union is oftentimes evolved, if qualities so transposed can be called union; but it was evidently not so in this case.

"Why should I be angry, cousin?" Rachel answered. "It is very kind of you; you are always kind. But I had rather walk home with my young friend here; as I told you. Come, Geoffrey!" She linked her arm in that of the delighted boy, and left the room with him.

"John!" said Ninian, after a pause, his kind eyes resting on his friend.

"Well, Ninian!" The young man tried to smile, but his face quivered like a woman's. He apologised; hiding his weakness, as men usually do before each other. "I am not quite well, I think. I have had an anxious

time of late. It will be better for me when all is over." He broke off, seeming to tremble at his own prophecy.

"Yes; when all is over, and you are settled at your manse in the Highlands. Think what a great work you have before you there."

"Ay, my Master's work. I ought to give myself wholly to that—I ought—I ought! And yet, Ninian——"

"We are quite ready, and your cousin bade me call you," interrupted Edmund, at the door.

John Forsyth grasped his friend's hand, and vanished instantly.

It was with a thoughtful, even sad gaze, that Ninian saw the three depart. Indulging in a sort of tranquil sigh, as if he congratulated himself on his own serene and unstirred heart, he went back to his book, till Tinie teased him out of it; and then he sat for a long time, smiling at her chatter, and idly watching the shadow of Hope Ansted's curls, cast on the parlour wall.

CHAPTER V.

“ You said it would be better when all was over: well—all *is* over !”

Such was the hoarse, hurried speech which burst from John Forsyth, after half an hour’s ordinary chat, and a long interval of silence following. The two friends were sitting together alone in Ninian’s study.

Mr. Græme looked up. He had been listening to the clear voices of the girls singing in the next room ; thinking likewise how much good they might all do to one another, now that Hope Ansted’s freezing boarding-school formalities were wearing off, and her true nature appearing now and then. He had even proposed to himself a plan for lengthening her visit, and sending her with

“the children” to the shores of Clyde, if by any means he could afford them a summer trip. Her accomplishments—since of late it had been found out that, though only half-educated, she was externally “accomplished”—would be of infinite advantage to Tinie. For herself, surely the most frozen-hearted young lady in the world must benefit by association with Tinie’s frank, warm nature! So pondered the affectionate brother; until his pleasant musings were broken by those three words—ever so full of bitterness—“All is over!”

He forgot himself, and his whole thoughts flew to his companion, his old playmate, whose simple heart had ever been open to him. The contrast in their characters—Ninian’s strength and John Forsyth’s almost feminine gentleness—had brought into the bond a degree of tenderness, even affection, such as rarely subsists between man and man.

He laid his hand on Forsyth’s shoulder. “John, I know all—or guess all. You may

speak to me or not, just as you like. If I could do you any good, being some years older than yourself——”

“ But you never felt as I feel. Oh, how I have loved that woman !” Uttering this, or rather letting it burst from him, because the pang was too strong for his control, John Forsyth bowed himself almost in shame.

“ You are right; I don’t think I ever did feel thus,” said Ninian, considerately turning the conversation on himself and from his friend. “ I have had my fancies as a boy, and even as a young man. We all have, over and over again, until the world’s hard struggle knocks our foolish dreams out of us. And mine were never very serious,” he added, smiling. “ I love my home and my sisters better than any woman in the land.”

“ You are sure of that ?” cried Forsyth, eagerly.

“ Yes, quite sure. Why ?”

“ Because—Never mind, it was all folly —the folly of a man who thinks all the world

must see his idol with his own eyes. But tell me one thing, Ninian. How is it that you are such friends with *her*? How is it that she, who hates strangers, likes you—lets you talk with her, reason with her, even control her? This has almost made me mad at times, though it was, after all, only the influence you seem to have over everybody. And I trusted you, Græme. I knew you would never be so——”

“ That I should never be so mistaken as to think in any way but as a friend of Rachel Armstrong,” said Ninian, gravely. “ I believe,—and I hinted the same to you long ago,—that any man who did so would only bring sorrow on himself.”

“ I know it. But in these matters we cannot help ourselves. If we could, what an awful thing that I, a minister before God, with my whole soul lately vowed to His service, should forget it all—all—earth and heaven together, in the passion with which this woman has filled me. Oh! how I scorn and loathe myself!”

It was indeed pitiful to see the change wrought in him who had looked down so serene, so apostle-like, from the pulpit, only a few months before. Ninian was stirred with a feeling of great compassion—more compassion than sympathy, for he was beholding what he scarce understood—how could he! Yet he was conscious of a sort of vague unrest, as if his heart warned him that the agony of emotion he now witnessed was one universal and inevitable as death. It might come to himself in time.

He said, tenderly, “John, we have been boys together. You need not mind telling me anything or everything which has happened. What do you mean by saying that ‘all is over?’”

There was no resisting his gentleness ; and John Forsyth, in those words, few and broken, with which suppressed feeling ever speaks, told his story—a story which, except under rare circumstances such as these, one man is generally very slow to tell to another—the tale of disappointed love. Unable to bear the soli-

tude of his manse, haunted even in his sacred duties by this passion which had risen up he knew not how, he had come back determined to risk all, and at once win or lose the woman who had so enthralled him.

“ How did she receive you ? What was her answer ? ” asked Ninian, almost as strongly moved as if his own fate had hung upon the balance.

“ She gave none ; she smiled and seemed at first to believe I was jesting ; mocked at the possibility of such a thing as love between us, whose natures were as wide asunder as the poles. I knew that,” bitterly added John Forsyth ; “ there was no sympathy between us in any one thing, and yet I loved her. It often happens thus.”

“ I believe so, for a time at least,” said Ninian ; but he had too much tact to intrude his own particular theory on that subject, though from it he drew consolation as regarded his friend.

“ At length, when I was half beside myself, she changed her manner to taunting, and

asked me what my mother would say to my wooing her, who had been thought mad, who had said of herself, and about whom there had been said, such strange things. I answered that I cared for none of them—that all her delusions sprang from her fever—that I believed she was the true, pure-hearted girl I had always known her, my cousin, Rachel Armstrong. On which she cried out that it was false, for that she was not Rachel Armstrong; and her old wild looks and wild fancies came over her, until I dared not say another word."

Ninian looked troubled. Whatever he had known or guessed of Rachel's secrets, he had sedulously kept in his own breast. He thought it his duty. But here was a great strait. Keenly he felt it, when John Forsyth, after long waiting for the words of advice, of consolation, to gain which so many came to Ninian Græme, said in a tone of much agitation,

" Do you think my mother was right after all, and that Heaven has seen fit to lay this

awful doom upon one who else would be too like an angel ! Do you think my poor Rachel is really mad ?"

" No !" answered Ninian ; he could not but answer thus. " Still her mind has been touched ; she confessed so one day to me. I imagine it was by some great shock. However, we must have patience. If——" and a sudden thought appeared to strike him. " If you would let me speak to her."

The unfortunate lover brightened up ; he clung to any straw. " Oh ! do speak to her. She may be guided by you."

" We shall see ; but I warn you, John, as I warned you before, it is my firm belief that no man living will now win Rachel Armstrong."

Yet she was indeed a creature that many a man might have longed to win. Ninian thought so, when reaching Musselburgh, he saw her who had been called the " daft leddy," sitting, as an olden record touchingly says of another poor maniac, " clothed, and in her right mind." And truly hers was a mind of

no common order. Lately Ninian had felt convinced of this, and had supplied her with books, so as to gratify her craving desire for the cultivation of her intellect.

“What a marvellous progress you have made in these few months,” said he, as, to open the conversation naturally, he took up her books in succession. “Here are your German and Spanish authors, Schiller and Calderon. How fond you seem to be of plays?”

“Yes,” Rachel answered, “I like to see humanity as it is in the drama; not moving calmly along, but climaxing into passion; compressing the emotions of an existence into a few scenes. I feel it all—I could act it all. It is to me like distilling the very wine of life into one draught, drinking it, and dashing down the cup,—as I would!”

Ninian smiled.

“I talk oddly, I know,” added Rachel, slightly colouring. “I hope there is nothing wrong in that? You see, I am so unacquainted with the world. When I enter it—as I shall some time—do you think people will

ridicule me? In plain truth, Mr. Græme, what do you suppose will be said of me?"

"That you are a rather original but very clever woman." He always encouraged her to the utmost of his power, for her sensitiveness, as regarded every one's opinion, was positively painful. "But tell me, Rachel," said he, drawing his chair to the table, and beginning one of the friendly chats in which they were wont to indulge, "tell me what you mean by entering the world?"

She gave him a quick suspicious glance; then smiling to herself, read a line out of the Shakespeare that lay open at her hand :

When King Cophetua loved the beggar-maid.

"But you are not the beggar-maid—and, supposing you were such, as yet—excuse me—I see no symptoms of the approach of King Cophetua."

Rachel laughed, nor could Ninian help echoing her. Both were the sort of characters in which an under-lying current of humour makes the transition from tragedy

to comedy easy enough. After a few minutes of bantering chat, Ninian tried to turn the conversation to the subject which, even while he jested, lay still heavy at his heart. And when he looked at Rachel sitting opposite, her face brightened with returning health, her marvellous eyes shining out from under her heavy hair—that would have driven a painter wild with its rich red-brown tint, like autumn leaves—verily, Ninian ceased to marvel at John Forsyth's frantic passion for this woman.

“Are you qualifying yourself with these for some grand *rôle* on the world's stage!” said Ninian, glancing at her numerous books. “Tell me honestly, Rachel, what did you mean by the remark you made just now?”

“Merely that I suppose I shall not always lead this quiet life with worthy Mrs. Forsyth. In fact, I begin to weary of it already.”

“And what do you mean to do?”

“I—nothing! I must only wait—wait!”

“Until there comes to you the usual lot of woman—marriage?” He said the word

distinctly, fixing on her his penetrating eyes. Beneath them her colour came and went in painful emotion.

“ You are not kind, Mr. Græme; you want to force an answer from me; but you will not, no! as I told you before, you cannot! Think what you like—imagine what you like—for I never yet told a lie, nor will I, even for— But you shall not get a word out of me—not a word!”

“ I have no desire, or if I had, no right. But one right I have, that of friendship. I came to talk with you about John Forsyth,” said Ninian, in his plain honest way.

“ Ah!”—And Rachel looked sharply at Mr. Græme, as if to see how much he knew. He did not disguise from her that he knew all. “ So!” she answered angrily, “ my cousin has told you of his folly, his egregious, consummate folly! How dared he dream of such a thing—and more, how dared he speak of it to me—to me who—”

She stopped. Her eyes flashed, and her right hand impetuously closed over the ring

she wore. Ninian saw the action, but continued as if he had noted it not.

“Rachel, I think you should not use the harsh word ‘dare.’ What presumption is there in any man offering his true honest love to any woman?—that is, if he deems hers still free.” Again his eyes met Rachel’s, and again she cowered before them, but made no answer. “I do not mean to blame you,” Ninian went on. “It is not your fault if you cannot accept John Forsyth; though it is a sore, sad thing to wound one so worthy as he. If done wantonly, a cruel and a wicked thing. Love is love, and we shall all find that out sometime or other, I suppose.”

Rachel leaned her brow upon her hand, and the angry flush faded, “Ah—yes—that is true,” she sighed. “Well, what do you wish to say to me? Speak openly, Mr. Græme; I always listen to, and honour you.”

“I scarcely know how to say what I must say,” answered Ninian, who felt his quiet heart stirred within him, and was strangely

puzzled with the new part he had to play. "For myself, I do not clearly enter into these things. I have been foolish in my time," he added, as his brown cheek slightly blushed. "I have courted my child-sweethearts, and trembled in sight of my boyish loves, but I never yet wooed *my wife*, as John Forsyth woos you. It seems to me an awful thing to feel as he does—as I saw him feel to-day. You must not trifle with such a passion—so intense—so absorbing. You cannot even understand it."

"Cannot I?" she said in a low voice. "Well, go on! Poor John!"

"Do you not see how it tears and consumes him in body and mind?—how his whole life seems dried up into one burning thought—how for the time, he is false even to his holy calling, and not even his vows to heaven come before his love of you? If this goes on much longer, he will be ruined—utterly ruined!" And Ninian, waxing earnest, spoke with a power that surprised himself.

"What do you want me to do?" said

Rachel, humbly, for her soul seemed shaken within her.

“To love him, and marry him, if you can.”

She leaped up as if stung. “Sir—Mr. Græme—this insult! But I forget!” She paced the room, vainly trying to grow calm. Ninian, watching her, almost reproached himself with cruelty; but the image of poor John Forsyth came between and urged him on.

“And if——,” said Rachel, stopping in front of him, her face all one pallor, but resolute and hard as stone—“if I answer, that I will not marry him—that I cannot—that there are reasons——”

“Then, I implore you, give him those reasons! He has a right to know—every man has, who risks his all upon one hope, and loses it. See,” he added, taking her hand with a brotherly gentleness, yet solemn withal; “see how openly I deal with you. I would not try you so sorely; but I must save that poor fellow, whose true heart is slowly breaking. Is there, indeed, no hope for him?”

“I tell you,” cried Rachel, and her com-

passion—for there had come a dawning compassion into her aspect—was thrilled with a rapturous triumph—“I tell you, if I indeed loved John Forsyth as he desires, I could not—dared not marry him, or I should break God’s law and man’s.”

“Wherefore?”

“I must not explain. *He* made me promise that I would not. He said his worldly honour depended on my keeping silence—that he—oh, what am I saying!”

With great pity Ninian looked down upon the young creature, struck by a sudden agony. Was it of sorrow only, or also of shame? A terrible doubt entered his mind, but he cast it from him. “You need not fear me, Rachel,” he said. “You are betraying nothing that I have not suspected this long time.”

“Suspected—what is it you suspect?”

“That what you said when you were ill was true. That you are married.”

“I *am* married!” and she rose up proudly. “I will not deny it. I am married.”

Still Ninian's look of deep compassion changed not. Rachel saw it. "Well, why are you silent? Had we not a right to keep this secret, if we saw fit—I and—*my husband*?"

Oh, the pride, the passionate love with which her lips gushed out that word! Its utterance seemed so divine a music, that all the tumult in her breast grew stilled at once.

She sat down with an air of beautiful matronly repose. "Now, Mr. Græme, you know the truth. None but you, whom I honour more than any man in the world, except one—none but you should have won it from me."

"Pardon me," said Ninian, struck by the new dignity of her manner. "I meant not to pry into your secrets, believe me, Mrs."—Armstrong he was about to say, but paused, and added, "Sabine."

"Hush, hush," cried Rachel, wildly. "What have I done! I have disobeyed—betrayed him. Oh! my husband—my husband! He will never forgive me. He

said he would not." Her agitation became insupportable; she paced the room, wringing her hands, and bursting at times into broken exclamations.

"I kept it so long—this heavy secret! So many deceptions I had to frame—I that never deceived any one before! But that deceit was surely no sin; or if it were—I think, nay, I am almost sure"—her voice sank hoarsely—"I should have done it for his sake. Yet I have suffered so much! He has need to love me—indeed he has!"

"Take comfort, since he does indeed love you," said Ninian, kindly, for his heart melted towards the unhappy young creature—she was unhappy, he saw, though she hid it bravely. "And be sure that I have kept, and will keep your secret silent evermore."

He stretched out his hand: Rachel grasped it as the drowning grasp at a reed. "I will trust you—I think *he* would. And perhaps he would allow me, in this great strait—Oh, if he did but know how sorely his wife suffers!"

"Then he does not know? He has left

you—I mean, that you are parted from one another?—For a time only, I hope?"

"I will not have you questioning me," Rachel cried, angrily. "And yet what a poor wayward fool I am! You know part; I ought, for my own honour's sake, to tell you all—but then my husband! What am I saying!—as if anything I could tell might shame him! No, Mr. Græme, he is all good; there is no fault in him. It was only my miserable low estate. By the time I have made myself worthy of him, he will take me home—I know he will!"

Ninian looked the inquiry he could not help thinking, though he asked no more. But something in his gentle, serene face, said, "Trust me, and take comfort in me."

"I will trust you," once more said Rachel. "I am not afraid of you, as I always was of—him that is my husband. But then he was like a god compared with me; in knowledge, in power, in beauty. I felt that from the first moment I ever saw him. It was just the story of Clytie and the Sun. Ah,

he taught me that story—all things I ever knew he taught me, or I learned them for his sake."

"It is a strange tale," said Ninian, thoughtfully. "And you, so ignorant and so lowly, to have raised yourself thus! It seems almost impossible."

"How could it be impossible—when I loved him! Nay, not loved, that is too low a word. It was adoration, as wild, as daring, as hopeless as Clytie's for the Sun. Until at last the Sun looking down from his sphere, saw the flower which his beams had wakened into life—saw it, loved it, lifted it up unto his heart. And the poor flower would have been content, even if his brightness had scorched it to death—knowing it had lived one hour there.—You think I am going mad again?" continued Rachel, forcing herself to mock herself; laughing aloud, while tears of passionate emotion gemmed her eyes.

"No, I do not think so," answered Ninian, simply. "But I wish you would tell me, in

plain words, the story of your marriage. If I could do you any good by my advice, or by my friendship, sincere as a brother's——”

“Thank you,” said Rachel, with much feeling, “I never had a brother; I never had any one in the world but *him*. Therefore, when after long years of love, I knew that I was loved too; when he took me to his heart, and asked me to give him myself and all my unworthiness—what right had I to say him nay? All I was or seemed to him of good, he had made me. He did but claim his own.”

“And so you were married! How, and where?” was Ninian’s blunt question. He was rather puzzled by these excited speeches of the poor girl, whose romantic imaginations were so opposed to his plain common sense. But the intense reality of passion that lay at the depth of all her vagaries, touched him in spite of himself.

There is no influence more soothing, more controlling, more holy, than that which a truly good man has over a woman, when from

both some stronger emotion has excluded the possibility of the tie between them being ever more than a quiet, brotherly and sisterly affection ; free from all constraint, yet mingled with a reverence, which through habitual intercourse is sometimes lost in the real fraternal bond. This tie—quite different from the “sentimental friendships” that often work so much woe—is indeed true friendship ; though softened, perhaps, and unconsciously refined by the difference of sex, which creates in the one power, in the other submission ; as should be ever between man and woman—the greater and the less.

Thus, when Ninian spoke, his calm mind ruling Rachel’s, impressed her with comfort and trust. She sat down—she was going to sit at his feet, but paused, remembering olden days. No, she would not show that tender humility to any man in the world but one. So she placed herself opposite to Ninian, saying, in a quiet, subdued way,

“ I cannot talk much ; besides, it seems so strange to talk of these things to any one.

But I will answer what questions you please to put."

"Well, then, tell me first, was any one present at your marriage?"

"No one."

"Was it before a minister?"

"It was not."

"Then I conclude it was one of those irregular marriages which we in Scotland hold legal. He acknowledged you as his wife before witnesses?"

"No."

Ninian's start expressed distrust and fear. Rachel crimsoned over face and neck.

"Do you insult me by hinting that—that—" She stopped, as if unable to utter such a possibility.

"I hint nothing, but I plainly ask what form of marriage passed between you and this gentleman? Was it a true marriage, according to the law of Scotland?"

"It was; I knew that, ignorant as I was; and if I had not known it, he said so, which was enough," she answered proudly.

Ninian looked anxious, as a man who knew the world might well look and feel, seeing the utter unsuspiciousness of this young creature. “Rachel,” he said, earnestly, “I wish you would tell me the entire truth. I need not add, that it shall never pass my lips. But since by your own confession this marriage must have been private, informal, and probably open to doubt, it is right that some friend should know the particulars, for your own sake, and as a safeguard.”

“A safeguard,” she answered, contemptuously. “A safeguard against *him*! To place you as a watch between me and my husband!”

“I contemplated no such position,” said Ninian, almost exasperated. “And since you think me unworthy of any trust, I had better leave you, Mrs. Sabine.”

She looked alarmed. “How did you know that name?”

“You forget—you uttered it yourself once in my hearing.”

“I did, I did!” cried she, in much agitation. “I have betrayed him—disobeyed him.

It is no use concealing anything now. Oh, if he knew this, would he ever forgive me!"

"He would, were he an honest, honourable man."

"Do you dare to doubt it? or to throw a shadow of blame upon my Geoffrey?"

"There is generally some blame when a man contracts a secret and irregular marriage," said Ninian, steadily. "Especially as Mr. Geoffrey Sabine,"—he pointedly repeated the name, fixing it on his own memory likewise,—"Mr. Geoffrey Sabine probably knew more of the world than did his wife."

"His wife. Yes! I am his wife," cried Rachel, restlessly. "He would not have deceived me in anything. He could not, when I so trusted him—when we were handfasted over the Bible, and he took a solemn oath to me, as I to him."

"Was that all?" said Ninian, in visible anxiety.

Again the angry flush darkened Rachel's brow. "I tell you," she cried, vehemently, "we were married, solemnly and truly, in the

way my father and mother, and many another pair in our Border country, were married; by a written paper. Likewise, he put on my finger my mother's guard-ring—here!"

"But the paper—what like was it?"

"Word for word as my mother's was. Now, Mr. Græme, I will not be questioned, nor will I answer any more."

"Word for word as your mother's was," repeated Ninian, much relieved. "It was then no doubt a written acknowledgment of marriage, signed with the name of Geoffrey Sabine?"

Rachel made a slight assent with the head, but her lips were resolutely closed.

"If so, it is certainly a valid marriage. Still, it ought to be confirmed publicly, for his own honour, and more than all, for yours."

There was no answer; only Rachel crushed her hands upon her breast, as if to keep down the woman's pride 'that, for love's sake, endured such sore humiliation.

"There is one question more I should like to ask. How long is this ago?"

Rachel maintained her obstinate silence.

It tried Mr. Græme's patience greatly, but still he maintained his kindly interest.

"Why should you keep up this reserve with me? Do I not already know almost all this mystery? Believe me, I have no motive but the wish to serve, or, if not to serve, at least to advise and comfort you."

There is something in a good man's voice, attuned to wise and friendly sympathy, which stirs every chord in a sorrowful heart. And poor Rachel's had been so long dumb and deaf to all confidence, shut up within itself, bearing its pangs, its struggles alone. Nothing was heard or seen behind its closed door, until Ninian came and touched the key.

She lifted her head, which had sunk drearily between her hands, and looked him full in the face. Now Ninian was, as before said, one of those whom merely to look upon was to trust.

"I will tell you all," Rachel said at last. "I think my husband would allow me, if he knew you. And what is done, is done! If he will but forgive me," she added, sighing.

"He will—he ought. Now tell me," con-

tinued Ninian, wishing to keep her to the point gained, “ how long have you been married ?”

“ A year or more. It was in the winter time. He was very ill. He could not bear our Scottish winters.”

“ He was not a Scotsman, then ?”

“ No. He had come a stranger to the neighbourhood, and returned summer after summer, lodging with an old woman—an Englishwoman, named Jane Sedley.”

“ But—your marriage ?”

“ Thus it happened. He had, as I said, a long illness. I was half distracted. I would have gone to him through flood and fire; but I was not his wife, and had no right. So, for his honour and mine, that I might nurse him without any after-blame, he married me.”

“ In the way I concluded—by a written acknowledgment ?”

She assented. “ We dared not reveal it, for reasons which he explained, and with which I was satisfied. What matter ? I would have given him my life, had he asked

it! I had little fear of detection—no one minded my goings out or comings in. So, all winter we kept our secret safe. Night after night, when he lay ill, I stole away while all were asleep, crossing the farm-yard with bare feet—lest they should trace my shoe-marks in the snow—walking miles across the country, just to sit by his side for an hour, and tend him, and comfort him. For I was his wife: and I loved him—oh, Heaven! how I loved him!"

Her lips grew trembling and convulsed. She made one violent struggle, and then burst into a passion of tears. Ninian, awed and touched by her emotion, walked aside until the torrent had spent itself, and she was again calm. Then he came, and gently took her hand.

"Perhaps, Rachel—you will let me call you Rachel still? for it seems best in every way—perhaps we ought to talk no more to-day?"

"We must, for after to-day I shall keep silence. A few words will be enough. In

the spring my husband recovered ; we had one month—two months of perfect wedded happiness, meeting continually."

" Some one knew of your meetings ? You must have trusted some one."

" Jane Sedley knew. No one else. It could not be," said Rachel, somewhat petulantly. " But those two months—how blessed they were !—until at last he was summoned away."

" Who summoned him ?"

" I cannot tell. Some death or other happened. I never asked ; I knew nothing about his relations—I only loved himself. I only felt that he was gone, so suddenly that he could not even bid me farewell."

" Did he not write ?"

" He never wrote to me ; we agreed he should not. It was not safe, considering our secret. He said so, and I was content. Therefore, when he went, leaving me only a message, everything in the world seemed to go from me too. I had a fever first, and afterwards—you know what I was."

“Poor soul,” murmured Ninian, in great compassion.

Her silence, and the painful consciousness which made her shrink from saying “I was mad,” were more piteous than any complaints.

She went on at last: “It is no use for me to try to remember anything of that blank time. Some fancy connected with you is the first thing I recollect: your coming—your kindness—or some words you said—but all is confused still. I was ill afterwards, and when I was recovering, Jane Sedley came to see me, bringing me something.” Her eyes lit with rapturous joy, and she drew from her bosom a letter, or rather a mere note, for there seemed in it only half a dozen lines: “It is from my husband—my own dear husband.”

“I am glad,” said Ninian—and his acute legal perception made him really glad, for more reasons than one, of this evidence to the marriage, of which the husband seemed somewhat ashamed. “You must carefully keep this letter; it is additional proof.”

“ Proof of what ?”

“ Of your marriage, in case your husband disclaimed it,” said Ninian, with some hesitation.

“ I am to doubt him, then ?” she cried, indignantly. “ I am to hold this letter—this precious letter—the only one I ever had—where I see written down that I am ‘ his Rachel,’ his ‘ own Rachel’—I am to keep this as a threat against him—as a sign of distrust ? Look then ! See what I can do to show how firmly I believe in my husband.”

She re-opened the letter—read it—devouring every word with her eyes—kissed it passionately—then put it between the bars of the grate, and saw the fire crackle round it, crisp it, seize on it. Though she turned pale, and shuddered as if it had been a living thing in the flames—nay, even once put out her hand to snatch it thence—yet she stood still, and let it burn. When it was consumed, and of her cherished treasure there remained nothing but a few black airy frag-

ments stirring among the red ashes—she sank down exhausted.

“I am sorry you have done this,” said Ninian Græme, who, however, had been effectually restrained from interfering in the doing of it.

“I that have done it? It is you—only you!” cried Rachel, in a burst of remorse. “You have made me burn my husband’s letter—the dear letter—the kind letter! Oh, what a wretch am I! And for you—I hate you—I despise you—I——”

“Rachel!” He met her with the calm look with which an elder brother would meet a passionate child. Very soon she became humbled, and even composed.

“Forgive me, Mr. Græme; I know you are kind and good, and wish——”

“I wish only to aid in making you happy.”

“No one can do that. It must rest with my husband and his will. He is gone abroad—I may explain thus much. His fortunes are changed, he tells me; and he cannot yet acknowledge our marriage, or take me home.

Home!" she added, with a rapturous lingering on the word. "To think that I shall one day have a home with him! For this I would bear all things—even the silence which he says must be between us until he comes."

"That is hard."

"No—for it is his will, and I am his wife. I love him and obey him."

"God help thee, poor soul!" said Ninian, in his heart. Never so clearly had he seen what true love was. Not that he had ever doubted its existence, but his youthful fancies had melted away; and having been "in love" and out of it—boy-fashion—half a dozen times, he had ceased to believe in, or speculate about such things. His mind, ever pure as it was manly and brave, had engrossed itself with other interests and duties, and other kinds of affection, so that for years he had scarcely thought of love at all. Now at last it crossed his path; showing itself as life's one great reality; touching him not individually, but still passing near him, until he was forced to acknowledge it as a truth that was and might

be. It made him thoughtful, not only for others, but himself.

They kept a long silence—Ninian and Rachel. At last the former broke it. “There is one thing which we both seem almost to have lost sight of. What shall I say to my poor friend ?”

“ What friend ?” said Rachel, starting from a reverie.

“ John Forsyth.”

“ I had forgotten his very existence. Why bring back his name ? What signifies aught of him ?”

“ Rachel—that is not like you !”

“ No; it is not like me,” she said, mournfully. “ Ah, but you know now how I suffer. It is no wonder if I am bitter sometimes. Forgive me ! Yes, we must think of poor John. What can I do ?—what can I say ? Help me—do help me. I have no counsellor in the world but you—till my husband comes.” She always grew subdued, dignified, and calm, the moment she uttered that name.

“ I trust he will come soon ; it is right he

should," Ninian could not forbear saying.
" Meantime, I must save my friend's peace, if possible."

" You will not tell him the truth? You will not be so false as to make me still further disobey my husband?"

" I will not. But this I must tell Forsyth —that he seeks one utterly beyond his hope, since you belong to another. Whether by troth or marriage, I need not say; and he will not ask. If you had only told him this yourself, or at least let him guess it——"

" Was I, a wedded wife, even in thought to anticipate another man's wooing? I never dreamed of such a wrong."

Ninian saw the view her excited fancy took of the case, and argued no more.

" Remember, you have promised!" cried Rachel, half-imploring, half-defying, as he quitted her.

" I have promised. Be at rest!" His face was the face of one who never uttered a falsehood or broke a pledge. Rachel felt it, and was satisfied.

When Ninian reached The Gowans, there was no one at home but little Hope Ansted, sitting with a book by the parlour fire. She looked up, smiling from under her long curls.

“I have read it all through, as you told me; and I like it—oh! so much!”

There was about her at once a childish simplicity and a womanly repose. It seemed to Ninian like coming out of a stormy atmosphere into one of peace and calm. He sat down by her side, and talked to her about the book she read, and other ordinary things, for half an hour. He then rather unwillingly departed, to fulfil his painful mission to John Forsyth.

CHAPTER VI.

"It is a sad thing about John Forsyth," said kind Lindsay Græme, as she saw her brother sitting over the fire in a brown study. "You were thinking of him, were you not?"

"Partly. His mother has got him safe home to the manse, she writes me. Poor fellow! He will recover there. It would have been melancholy had he died."

"One at least would have suffered, and rightly," said Lindsay, with some bitterness, for her heart had always yearned over John Forsyth since the time when he had been a boyish favourite with one she loved. "You never told me what had happened, brother, but I guessed it all."

"All?" Ninian looked alarmed, until

he recollected how impossible it was that Lindsay should know more than what Mrs. Forsyth had, in her loquacious sorrow, betrayed to all the family—namely, Rachel Armstrong's extraordinary mental delusions, and the folly of poor John, who on his cousin's recovery had wished to marry her.

"It was a bitter thing for him, and I think Rachel acted wrong," continued Miss Græme.

"We should not judge," said Ninian, briefly, as, evidently wishing to end the conversation, he turned again to his occupation of looking over Hope Ansted's exercise-book. He had taught her daily with his sisters for a long time now.

Lindsay cast more than one doubtful glance upon her brother, as if his short answer about Rachel Armstrong had struck her with a faint suspicion—a sisterly weakness, which all sisters have. After awhile, she said,

"I was pondering, Ninian, how happy we all are together here. Even you seem

merrier than you used to be. Only think of Our Brother dancing as he did last week, and as I suppose he will again to-night."

"He cannot well help it," answered Ninian, smiling. "You know it is Hope's birthday, and we agreed to keep it just the same as those of the other children."

"She is, indeed, become one of the children. I never saw a girl so changed. She seems content with us too, though she cannot help feeling her father's cruel neglect. But I am sure she is no burden upon us, bless her!"

Here Ninian—walking across the room to the next—stopped on his way to lean over his sister affectionately, and tell her she was the kindest creature in the world to every one.

"Even to Rachel Armstrong?"

"Why do you speak of her? I know you two could never sympathise much; you are such opposite characters. Still, Lindsay, you must always be kind to her—as indeed you are," said Ninian, as he quitted the room.

He was soon seen wandering about the garden—his especial hobby, cultivated by himself, until it had become the pride of The Gowans. All the four girls were haunting him, as usual ; never was there such a popular elder brother. Their attentions, however, might not now have been quite disinterested, for they re-entered the room laden with a quantity of Ninian's beloved roses, to gather every one of which, as he jestingly told them, was like plucking a piece out of his heart.

“ Especially the yellow ones. I did not think you ever would have gained that beauty you so wished for, Hope,” cried Tinie. “ But you and I can coax anything out of brother Ninian, when we get him in a generous mood.”

“ Ah, you are heartless lassies, both.” And Ninian shook his head at Hope, who stood before the glass, fixing the rose in her hair. She made a pretty picture, and he looked at her until his aspect became grave.

“ You are not angry, or sorry about the

rose," said Hope, noticing him. "If you are, do let me take it back again to the green-house. It will keep some time in water, you know." And with a gentle submissiveness she put it in his hand.

"Foolish child:—what a tyrant you imagine me to be," said Ninian, laughing. "You are not afraid of me now, surely?"

"No, indeed, Mr. Græme." Hope looked up with a frank affection. And—she had such lovely eyes!

"Don't give her the rose again," interposed Ruth, gravely. "A yellow rose means sorrow. You would not give her that?"

"Heaven forbid!" said Ninian, so earnestly that Hope once more lifted up her fair eyelids in some surprise. "Nay, I will compromise the matter." He went out, and brought in from his little green-house its one white rose—his pet 'Duchess of Sutherland'—saying affectionately, "Now, will our dear Hope accept this, with many happy returns of the day?"

Hope thanked him, and resignedly parted with her yellow rose.

"You have forgotten one thing when you wished her 'many happy returns,'" cried Tinie, mischievously. "Something that we all get from brother Ninian on our birthdays, though he looks as if he were a terrible martyr all the while. But if he will not give it, I would take it, Hope, were I you. You little know how nice it is."

At this last *sotto voce* remark, Hope began to blush, as a girl of her age was sure to do. So did Ninian, a circumstance not quite so likely. But he acted up to his duty; he approached his ward and gravely kissed her forehead. Then, after a few minutes' more chatter among his sisters, he took up his books and retired to his own room.

There, despite what Lindsay said of his cheerfulness, the elder brother often passed many a thoughtful hour. Worldly cares frequently weighed upon him; and something he suffered from his kindly sympathies for others, especially for John Forsyth and Rachel. No little trouble, too, he had from those wild boys, Hope Ansted's brothers, who, after tormenting his life out for a season in Edin-

burgh, were at last despatched to their London school. Yet he had borne with them patiently; for, rude as they were, their sister seemed to love them. The first time any real feeling had been seen to burst through the frigid decorum of her education, was when she bade good-by to Willie and Bob. Her guardian had liked her better from that moment. He sat thinking of this now, moralising concerning the evil of such a bringing up, and speculating rather anxiously concerning the future of this girl, so curiously thrown upon his hands. She was not a child, though her manners were very child-like: she could not be sent to school again. Her father had mentioned, in his rough way, "that Hope must turn governess." But Ninian trembled to send out into the hard world a creature so simple—even to ignorance, and so very pretty. Of late, pursuing this train of thoughts, he had begun to consider the latter fact, and he could not deny its truth. She was certainly prettier than the twins—prettier even than his pet Tinie. There came into Ninian's mind the foolish

thought for which he had reproved his sisters — viz., the possibility of Edmund's falling in love with her. But Edmund was occupied with his college studies, and all his spare time he passed at Musselburgh with his friend Mrs. Armstrong. Ninian was rather glad it was so ; he really should not have liked the love-epidemic to have entered his peaceful household. Plenty of time for that, years hence!

He had dismissed these contemplations as idle, and was just setting to work, when he heard a timid knock at his study-door, and Hope Ansted stole in. She always seemed to steal or glide about everywhere, she was such a very quiet girl.

“ Tinie sent me for a book, if you will excuse me.”

“ Oh, yes. But she should have come herself, the lazy little thing. Why did she not ?”

“ She said—shall I tell the exact truth, as you have always taught me to do ?”

“ Certainly, my dear child.”

“That, if I interrupted you, you would not scold me, because I was a stranger and not your sister.”

“Not my sister in truth, but I trust no stranger,” said Ninian, as he again bent over his book.

Hope looked over the shelves for the volume she wanted, but, when found, she lingered some time, turning over its pages, and then glancing timidly at her guardian. At last she came to his table.

“You have many letters there, Mr. Græme? Is there one from my father? I thought—he might have written to me to-day.”

There was a pained accent in her voice which touched Ninian; the more so, as she was rarely demonstrative in any way.

“I have no letter for you, Hope; but it may come by the next American mail. Perhaps, since you know your father has many cares, he has accidentally overlooked your birthday. Do not be unhappy, though: it has been remembered, you see.”

"Yes, you are all very kind to me." She turned to go away, but turned back, and said, with a strong effort, "Mr. Græme, I heard this morning, for the first time, something about you and my father." Her voice became almost inaudible, and her cheeks glowed painfully; she was evidently alluding to the bankruptcy and Ninian's generous forbearance. "It makes me ashamed to live here and receive such kindness from you. I wish"—here she fairly seemed inclined to cry—"I wish you would let me go away."

Ninian was quite confounded. In the first place, he never suspected her of such strong feelings; in the second, he had an instinctive masculine horror of a girl's tears; in the third, the idea of Hope Ansted's going away presented itself more unpleasantly than he had been at all conscious of until now.

"Are you tired of us, my dear?"

"Tired! I am happier here than I ever was in my life. I love you all, dearly—dearly—but—"

“‘But’ is a disagreeable little elf—especially on birthdays. Suppose we put him out of the question altogether,” said Ninian, cheerfully. “And don’t imagine we shall let you run away from us, my dear little girl.”

“Little girl!” Hope repeated, half-disposed to smile. “Why, I am eighteen to-day.”

“And I was thirty-one last month; so you are still a little girl compared with me. Come, don’t think of anything sad. Go back to my sisters, and try and feel as if you were really one of the lassies of The Gowans.”

“I wish I were! But then Willie, and Bob, and my father—ah! I thought my father would have written.” And again the fair eyelids grew heavy with sorrow.

Ninian could not bear to see it. “My dear Hope,” said he, “we cannot alter our fortunes; we must only draw from them what sweetness we may. Bear yours patiently, and do not grieve. Think how

much my sisters love you—just as if you were their own. And for me"—he paused—"while your own father is away, you must always try to consider me a father, an elder brother, or—what you like."

"I will," said Hope, timidly stretching out her two hands. She looked so sweet, innocent, and loveable—her face yet pale—the tears on her eyelids scarce dried—that, whether from the paternal spirit dawning in him, or from a sense of paternal duty, the grave Ninian once more stooped and kissed her. She did not seem at all surprised; thanking him affectionately, she took up Tinie's book and disappeared with her light, soft, gliding step.

But Ninian, standing where she left him, was conscious of a strange pleasure—a lightness that made everything bright. It was the happiness of doing good, of making others happy, he thought; though without self-glorying, for Ninian Græme was the humblest man alive. Still it was pleasant—he could not deny it—to see this young

mind and simple heart expand like a flower, and to know that his patient influence had effected all; that, but for him, this young life, now growing up so fresh and beautiful, might have withered in darkness.

“No wonder I like the child,” said he to himself, half ashamed of the act of affection which had given conclusive evidence of the fact. “She is to me as the plants that I rear in my garden. That poor rose-tree, for instance, which I found growing so wild and unsightly, and grafted it, and made it the best rose on the lawn—I like it best of all. It is my Hope Ansted.”

Smiling to himself at this conceit, Ninian put aside his books, and joined the rest of the family.

The parlour at The Gowans looked quite festive. It foreboded that terrible event, “a party;” at least as near an approach to one as the girls dared venture upon without offending Ninian’s known antipathy to such things. However, he came in smiling blandly, admired the flower-arranged room, and even

extended his approbation to the attire of his sisters. They were indeed a pretty girlish group, in their white dresses, all alike. The twins looked sonsie, fresh, and fair; Tinie perfectly bewitching, with the crimson fuschias drooping among her black hair; and Hope Ansted—

She was helping Lindsay at the tea-table; there was ever a great bond of amity between her and Our Sister. Demurely she sat, entrenched behind the urn, until a slant evening sunbeam found her out, brightening first her brown curls, and then the one rose—the precious “Duchess of Sutherland”—that, fastened in her high dress, nestled against her throat. Not an “alabaster” throat, as poets will persist in asserting; but one of fair, pink, healthy hue, against which the white rose-leaves contrasted well. Lindsay seemed quite proud of her favourite, and even secretly pointed out to Ninian how beautiful Hope looked to-night! He saw her beauty likewise—saw it as he had never seen it before.

“She appears more of a woman in that dress,” he observed.

“Of course she does,” answered Miss Græme; “she is eighteen. Our mother was a wife at eighteen; but Hope is such a child-like creature still.”

“Yes,” said Ninian. Nevertheless looking on the brow, which he fancied wore a deeper thought than ordinary—the brow he had kissed twice that day—he became silent and grave.

Never was there such a night as that night! Half a dozens guests added to the Græme family made up a goodly gathering.

“You know we never invited them; we only told them they might come if they liked,” whispered Tinie, in comical apology to her elder brother for the unparalleled numbers. But Ninian did not stand aghast as she expected; he even condescended to put off the slight shyness he generally wore in society, and to be as merry as he always was with his family at home.

“We'll get him to dance—you shall go

and ask him," said Tinie to Hope. (Miss Tinie kept floating and flashing hither and thither just like an omnipresent sunbeam.) "There—go up to him—compel him ! It's your right, 'you little birthday girl,' as we used to call one another when we were children."

And when Hope came up with her eyes cast down, in a half-demure, half-playful curtsey, Ninian fairly yielded, and was led off in triumph. They had a most eccentric quadrille, though; for he was, as Tinie observed, "a dear, old, stupid, good-for-nothing donkey," and her own partner, Professor Reay, a long-limbed, solemn-browed follower of the sciences, was not much better.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Tinie," said Reuben, who, like most younger brothers, was self-constituted censor-in-general. "How can you force the Professor to make himself so ridiculous ! He that was your father's friend and your brother's teacher, and wore his college gown when you were in your long-clothes."

“What a Methuselah he must be! I wonder if he is grey yet. I’ll go and see.”

“The age of this fossil formation,” Dr. Reay was saying, in his conversation with Ninian, “cannot be distinctly ascertained. But”—here he paused to shake his head, as if a fly had settled on his hair—“but probably we should have to go back to the antediluvian period.”

“I think we should,” whispered Tinie behind the professor’s chair. She had loved to play him tricks ever since he was a great, awkward, learned youth—elderly even in boyhood, and she a tiny child on his knee.

“What were you remarking, Miss Christina?” asked he, turning quickly at the sound of her merry voice, while a comical satisfaction diffused itself over his face. But the little fairy had disappeared in will-o’-the-wisp fashion, and the poor Professor plunged once more into his geological bog.

He was only drawn from thence to be blindfolded, and made the hero of that immortal game—the delight of little children

and great ones—from which, too, those solemn folk who have ceased to be either may extract a wholesome moral: for is not life one long game at blindman's buff?

“They are a happy set, are they not?” said Ninian, coming to Our Sister, who sat apart to guard from any accident Edmund's little plaster treasures, “Undine” and “Dorothea.”

“Very happy. It is quite a treat to see them.” And that she spoke the truth was evident in her face of cheerful serenity—the serenity of conquered sorrow. We cannot—will not believe this in our untried youth, when death itself seems preferable to the thought of a healed wound. But as wound after wound opens, and still life lingers and must linger,—for it takes a long time to die of a broken heart,—then we learn at last to thank God for the balm that allays its torture, for the slow years that scar over its rankling sore. Little sweetesses spring up in our path; strong, necessary, wholesome duties come like servants to uphold our

staggering feet, and we gird our draperies in such manner that they may fall over and hide the grievous wound ; marching on so cheerily and well that some closest friends would hardly believe it was there at all, until we lie before them in our death-clothes. And it is no matter *then* !

So Lindsay Græme sat and watched "the children" play, sometimes playing with them, especially when Hope Ansted asked her. She seemed better than any one to understand this young girl. And Hope, from some cause or other, appeared on this night to have cast off her usual constraint. If Tinie were the sunshine, *she* was certainly the clear, pure cloudland of the family atmosphere; colourless itself, but ready to receive all sympathetic tints, dark or bright.

"There's a head for you to study," said Mr. Græme aside to Professor Reay. He pointed out Hope, as she sat holding in her arms Ninian's pet cat, whom she was benevolently trying to soothe in recompense for this terrific invasion of the quiet parlour.



“Conscientiousness, good; range of domestic affections, ditto, especially philoprogenitiveness. Intellectual organs——”

“Not very remarkable, as I see myself,” interrupted Ninian; “yet, I assure you, I find far less trouble in teaching her than Tinie.”

“Ah! a wonderful steady head has Miss Christina; but she makes no use of it,” sighed the Professor. His keen grey eyes wore a dove-like softness as he followed the motions of the wilful girl, who was waltzing with Edmund to a degree that rendered his commendation quite true, though in a different sense to what he meant.

“No fear; she will grow sedate in time,” said the loving brother, on whom a word in Tinie’s dispraise ever jarred unpleasantly. “I assure you, she takes fits of study as deep as if she were going to be a Professor in petticoats. She sometimes threatens she will surpass even you—a sage philosopher, almost twice her age.”

“Ay, twice her age—I know that.” And the gaunt Professor, with a slight heaving of his broad chest, lounged back again to the

study. There he sank up to the ears in a large folio, and was missing for an hour after.

In the midst of the frolic—which after Doctor Reay's secession increased more and more—a message came that Mr. Græme was wanted. Ninian went somewhat reluctantly, for he was in the midst of a merry game at forfeits, wherein he had forgotten that there was such a thing as business in the world. He started to see in the hall Rachel Armstrong.

“ Well, Mr. Græme, I am here, you see.”

“ Nay, why did you not come sooner? You know we asked you.”

“ Yes, yes; but I am so restless, I cannot be quiet anywhere; so my evil genius drove me out, though it is a pleasant night, too. Look!” And she held up her shawl, dripping with heavy thunder-rain.

“ And so late, too. Were you not afraid?”

“ I never yet was afraid of anything,” said Rachel, coldly. “ Besides, I wanted to talk to you. Nay, let me come in quietly; don’t disturb the girls.”

Ninian certainly was a general martyr. He lured the Professor adroitly out of the study, and brought Rachel in there; with one rather wistful gaze he shut the door upon the merriment without, and sat down patiently to listen unto what she had to unfold.

“Have you heard from Mrs. Forsyth?” she asked abruptly.

“I have.”

“And how is that poor soul who loved me so well?” The latter words came out bitterly—mournfully.

“He is better: I hope he will recover in time,” said Ninian, gravely. “Why do you ask?”

“Because one sorrowful heart can learn to feel for another. Nay, not quite that.” And she corrected herself. “Understand me, Mr. Græme; I do not mean that I am unhappy, or have cause for unhappiness, but this state of suspense is hard to bear.”

“Very hard.”

“I am young in deceit. I cannot even hide my feelings as I ought. I never could before those whom I cared for at all. And

when that poor woman sobbed on my neck, and forgot all her prejudices against me, beseeching me to make her son happy—oh! it was a hard trial."

Ninian did not reply. There was no possible consolation to offer, and advice he had hitherto given in vain.

"I can bear it no longer. If I had kept silence for any cause, or any will but that which is my law, I should almost despise myself. Now at last I have done as you counselled—I have written to Geoffrey."

"Did you know where to write?" asked Ninian, in some surprise.

"I imagine my husband would not so neglect his wife as your question implies," she answered, haughtily. "He is abroad. Our correspondence is dangerous—almost impossible, he said, but he will send at intervals to Jane Sedley for tidings of me. There my letter will be found. It explains all. I must tell him the truth: God forbid I should deceive *him* too." And bitterly poor Rachel sighed.

"Did you mention me?"

“ Not by name; he charged me never to mention names. I told him the position in which I was placed, and how you, a friend—I merely said ‘a friend’—had accidentally discovered the truth, which I thought it shame to deny. I entreated him to let me follow your advice, and confess all to my cousin, if to no one else. Do you think,” added she, turning to Ninian, with the pitiable, helpless doubt which sometimes came over her—“ do you think I did right, and that he will forgive me ?”

“ You have done right, and a good and kind husband would see no need for pardon, no error,—on your side at least,” said Ninian, steadily.

Rachel’s anger rose a moment, as it ever did at the faintest shadow cast on him whom she thus madly worshipped. Poor soul! in her heart, so young still, was trembling that warning which, once unheeded, has afterwards pealed knell-like through many a heavy lifetime—“ Little children, keep yourselves from idols !”

“I know you mean me kindly, Mr. Græme, but you must not speak thus, even in hints. Nor is it generous of you, when my secret is in your hands—when I come to you, as now, for advice, help, comfort.”

“Rachel!” Deep, manly, and tender withal, was the compassion in Ninian’s eyes.

“I believe you—I trust you; if you had been born my brother, I could not trust you more. God bless you, and reward you! And, whatever becomes of me——”

Her voice faltered, ceased. She started up with an impatient gesture, as if condemning herself.

“Come, I want some amusement—excitement. Let me go and play among the girls, if they will have me.”

She left the room; and Ninian, after some sad ponderings over the lot which always seemed to involve him in the strangest passages of human fate, re-entered, and found her the centre of a delighted group. “She could be so agreeable when she liked,” as

Tinie observed; but she rarely condescended to notice any one save Edmund. However, to-night she was apparently in her gayest mood—had joined in their new game of acted charades, and was animating them with such life, that the performances of Tinie and Edmund in particular became positive histrionic studies.

They had chosen the easy word “Falsehood,” and after creditably indicating the two syllables, were at their wits’ end for a delineation of the complete word.

“Couldn’t we do a real scene out of a play? Mrs. Armstrong reads plays so beautifully, I am sure she could act one,” said her faithful and devoted young squire, Edmund.

Rachel assented at once. There seemed a waywardness about her that took refuge in any excitement.

“Come, Geoffrey, we will do what we read together the other day in Milman’s play. I will be *Bianca*, and you shall do *Fazio*. It is but a few words; do you remember them?”

Edmund did; but the lines very nearly went out of his head, when Rachel advanced to him with true tragedy-aspect:

“Fazio, thou hast seen Aldabella?”

And *Bianca* was obliged to prompt her lord's answer:

“Well,
She is no basilisk—there's no death in her eyes.”

There was a faint titter; but it was quelled by the next tone of Rachel's voice, so low, so deep; full of that passion wherein the true actress mimics life, in a manner that we often-times call unreal, because not one in a thousand ever sees or feels that climax of emotion out of which tragedy is evolved:

“Ay, Fazio, but there is; and more than death;
A death beyond the grave—a death of sin—
A howling, hideous, and eternal death—
Death the flesh shrinks from. No, thou must not see her.
Nay, I'm imperative—thou'rt mine, and shalt not.”

Here, astounded by her looks and gestures, poor young *Fazio* quite forgot his part. Rachel paused a moment, and then, as if the impulse upon her were too strong to resist, she broke out into a speech following, when *Bianca*, stung by her husband's taunts, continues:

“Take heed—we are passionate. Our milk of love
Doth turn to wormwood, and that’s bitter drinking. . . .
If that ye cast us to the winds, the winds
Will give us their unruly, restless nature ;
We whirl, and whirl ; and where we settle, Fazio,
But He who ruleth the mad winds can know.
If ye do drive the love out of my soul,
That is its motion, being, and its life,
There’ll be a conflict strange and horrible
Among all fearful and ill-visaged fiends
For the blank void ; and their mad revel there
Will make me—oh ! I know not what—hate thee !”

“Heavens and earth !” cried worthy, simple-souled, Professor Reay, using his sole adjuration, which might be a fond memento of his two favourite sciences, astronomy and geology—“Heavens and earth ! Miss O’Neil herself was never finer !”

Now they all knew, that if there ever had been a bit of romance in the Professor’s life, it was a boyish passion for Miss O’Neil—a theatrical adoration, that in its wildest moments never approached nearer to its object than the second row of the pit of Edinburgh Theatre. But it invested his opinion even now with a sort of importance, which made all eyes turn curiously to Rachel Armstrong.

She, when her lips closed over the last words, had leant, white as marble, against the wall. But there was a power and grandeur about her whole aspect still. The afflatus of genius had been felt by her, and seen in her. It was something like the dawning of a destiny.

“What did you think of Mrs. Armstrong?” said Lindsay, when, all strangers dispersed, and some of the family likewise, she and Ninian, Tinie and Hope, stood together in the darkened room. “It was perfectly astonishing. I would not wonder if, some day——”

“Hush!” said Ninian. He, more than any, had been startled—overwhelmed; not, like the rest, by one thought, but many. They had only admired the glitter, beautiful yet awful, of the flames; he had seen the volcano beneath.

“How did *you* feel, Hope, my dear?” said Miss Græme, after Tinie had exhausted her raptures. “Did you admire Mrs. Armstrong?”

“She frightened me,” whispered Hope. “I never saw anything like it before. I thought to myself, ‘What a fearful thing to be hated by such a woman!’ Her very look would kill me.”

“Poor wee bird!” said Lindsay, caressing the head which leaned against her. Ninian, too, turned round, half-smiling, to address a few consoling words to the “foolish little creature,” who looked quite pale with excitement.

It was strange that, with all his sympathy, warm and true, for Rachel, his consciousness of the critical position in which she stood, and his admiration for her marvellous powers, the last thing he thought of was the delicate, child-like profile he had seen resting against Lindsay’s breast.

CHAPTER VII.

THERE come at times in our life deep, still pauses; when we rest upon our full content, as a child lies down on the grass of a meadow, fearing nothing, desiring nothing, ceasing almost to think, and satisfied only to feel. One of these pauses was upon Ninian Græme. For weeks after that merry birthday-night, there seemed in him a charmed serenity which diffused itself over the whole circle at The Gowans, soothing all their little jarrings—for they had jarrings at times—what large family has not? The storm of rancorous wits ceased to fall upon poet Edmund's devoted head; Reuben and Charlie forgot to jangle; and the

twins no longer sat aloof, in their sober good sense, scorning Tinie's harmless vagaries. Tinie herself, who, from a vague jealousy, had once disliked and even ridiculed Hope Ansted, now struck up with her such a close amity, that Ninian christened them "Helena and Hermia." Edmund had even condescended to address a sonnet to them, as "the Red and the White Rose;" but there his admiration terminated. When once there was a vague revival of Tinie's jest respecting his probable love-enthralment, the boy indignantly scouted the idea of being captivated by "such a baby."

Besides, he was saved from becoming another example of the truth of Dr. Johnson's remark, "that many think themselves in love, when, in fact, they are only idle," by being at this time engrossed in studies which had now a new aim. One of those wild projects which trouble youth—nightmare fancies of honour and fame, often born of mere vague cravings after change—had visited Edmund

Græme ; and, created by Rachel Armstrong's praise of everything English, had shaped itself into one intense desire. The dream of the boy's existence was to go to London.

Ninian first heard this one quiet Sunday evening, when they two were alone. Lindsay had gone to bed, slightly complaining of illness—she was always delicate, so her retiring was nothing remarkable. The rest of the family were in the garden, all but Hope, who sat up-stairs, and Edmund, who kept his brother company. It was a beautiful thing to see the two together, half-sitting, half-lounging by the open window, Edmund with his head on Ninian's shoulder ; for, from the great difference in age, their affection was more demonstrative than is usually seen between brothers ; and Ninian often petted and caressed the boy in quite a fatherly way. There was an almost motherly feeling, too, in the pride he took in Edmund's talents, nay, even in his beauty, as, lying with his arm round his young brother's neck, he pulled the thick curls one by one. A sudden motion—a slight

dropping of the hand, was the only sign he gave of the pain he felt when startled by the declaration of the boy's wild scheme.

"So, Edmund," he said at length, "you want to go and leave me? Is home uncomfortable to you? Do I restrain you in any way?"

Edmund's fervent denial burst forth as his feelings prompted, but still "he wanted to begin the world."

"I had thought of that. It was my intention you should join me in my office-work the day you were nineteen—not long from this."

Edmund muttered the proverbial phrase about "drudgery of a desk."

"Yet at that desk I have laboured and must labour all my life. Once, I too thought it hard: I do not now. And you would have less to contend with than I, being placed not with strangers, but with your brother. Nor would I restrict your favourite pursuits. Your education has hitherto been

continued with a view to my seeing my boy Edmund a great man, one day."

The younger brother hung his head with a contrite look; but did not retract his words.

"Have you any fixed purpose? What do you want to go to London for?"

"To be—what you said you hoped I should be. And Mrs. Armstrong prophesied so too. I wish to become an author, and write a play."

This daring flight made Ninian smile, but it was a rather sorrowful smile, too. It grieved him to see one of his young birds leaving the nest. He hinted this.

"Yet we must all leave it some time or other," answered Edmund; "or else"—and he blushed beforehand at a speech which he would never have ventured except in his present chafed mood—"or else it may be with us as with the young birds that stay behind—we may be pushed out."

"What do you mean?" asked Ninian, quietly; though his colour rose.

"That—that"—and the boy hesitated; but

Ninian's truth-compelling eye was upon him. "We may not always have a home with our brother; he may marry."

"Did Mrs. Armstrong put that into your mind, too, my boy?"

"No: but many others have. Nothing is more likely."

"Nothing is more unlikely!" The firm voice indicated that Mr. Græme wished to cease the subject. A year ago he would have turned such a possibility into a merry jest, but somehow he could not now; perhaps because he had lately seen so much of the reality of these things in the cases of Rachel and of John Forsyth. He sat thoughtful awhile, and then said:

"I will tell you what we will do, Edmund. Stay with us a few months longer, until the session is ended; then, if you like, you shall go for a year to either of the London colleges."

"I did not mean that, my kind, good brother! I meant to go on my own resources:

to fight my own way, earn my own bread, and be independent."

"Ah! my boy, at your age, to be 'independent' in London, means to starve. We must not think of such a thing while I can manage it differently."

"But then what would it cost? Not much, I hope," said Edmund, driven by his earnestness to view the matter in a far more worldly light than he usually condescended to regard anything. "I would live in a garret—all poets do so at first, I think. I should want very little food; I never do when I am writing. And then, when I had sold my play and got it acted, I should be so rich—so happy."

So cried the boy, in that delirium of aspiration which genius of his kind—the most sensitive and brilliant, though not the greatest—almost always experiences in youth. His brother smiled, but rather absently, as if he had been thinking of something else. And when, touched by so much kindness, and moved to confidence of speech by the dark-

ness, Edmund opened the flood-gates of his heart, and poured out all its hopes, resolves, and desires, still Ninian's voice, though always encouraging and pleasant in tone, sounded rarer and rarer. He was thinking much.

They heard the girls' voices up the avenue.

"Edmund," said Ninian, suddenly, "I have one thing to beg of you. Do not let the rest of the children ever hear you speak as you did to-night."

"About my going away? Not if you desire it."

"No: but about—the possible change you alluded to. I tell you, it is impossible. I knew that from the time our father died, and so have never thought about it."

"About taking a wife do you mean, brother?"

"Hush! nonsense! Don't let the girls hear. Here I am, the Head of a Family, and here are my six bairns. Come, Edmund, let us go and meet them."

He stepped out of the window, and soon

his cheerful voice was heard along the alleys of the garden. He walked, with Tinie hanging on one arm, and Charlie pulling at the other; the inseparable twins, Esther and Ruth, forming the convoy behind. They all seemed to make more fuss over him than usual, since this was the last Sunday they would be at The Gowans for some weeks. For the hundredth time in his life, Ninian Græme had illustrated the adage of "Where there's a will there's a way." That very day he had put in Lindsay's hands a purse full enough to take the whole party to the shores of Clyde. So within two days they were all to be despatched, leaving the master of The Gowans to enjoy its solitude.

"But you will run over and see us sometimes, or I'll not go at all," said Tinie, with an affectionate pout. And Hope Ansted, who seemed to love Ninian, and to testify her love, as much as any of his sisters, echoed the same valorous determination, reinforced by the mute pleading of her eyes. Whereupon her

guardian said that he might come, and vowed to himself that he would, even though he were to work night and day in order to compass it.

They all sat up quite late that Sunday night talking of the blue Clyde, the shadowy giant-peaks of Arran, the Holy Loch, and the purple Argyle hills; planning pleasures all but impossible to realise in this dull work-a-day world.

But *l'homme propose, et Dieu dispose*—we never tire of the motto; so true, so universal, echoed solemnly by the events of each year—each day. Before the family could leave, Miss Græme's illness increased upon her, and at last was found to be that horror of horrors in a large household—an infectious fever. Great was the sorrow and consternation; but Ninian's decision ruled all.

“The children must go—and go at once,” said he, feeling that, humanly speaking, the lives of the little flock were in his hand. And though Tinie rebelled, and Esther and Ruth came hand-in-hand, with the rare tears visible

in their eyes, to entreat they might stay and nurse Our Sister, still Ninian was firm.

“I will fetch a nurse; she, and Katie and I, will be sufficient to watch over poor Lindsay,” said he to Reuben, the only ‘man of sense’ left among the brothers, for Charlie was frightened out of his wits, and the gentle, tender-hearted Edmund was in agonies of grief. “They must all start to-day, as we planned: you had better manage it during my absence in town. I will send back word that they must go.”

Ninian’s “must,” so seldom used, was, when used, as authoritative as the laws of the Medes and Persians. On his return, he found his household were all dispersed. A great change it seemed; he almost regretted not having said good-by to them, especially to Hope, whom he had scarcely seen for two days. He remembered, with a vague pain, that she was the only one who had not come and begged to stay behind: but then she was not of the family, and could not be expected to feel as Lindsay’s own sisters did.



He soon forgot all this in the alarm of the moment; in thinking of her danger who had been his guide and companion so many years—she to whom he was himself so dear—the dearest one now living. He knew and felt this more than ever now—that of all his brothers and sisters, nay, of every human being, there was none who loved him like poor Lindsay. He stood outside her door and listened to her ravings, when, fancying herself a girl once more, she talked of circumstances now long past, and known to none but him. There he stayed, until he could bear it no longer, but rushed out into the garden; walking up and down until the damp evening mist began to fall.

There was a light in the parlour. He thought it strange—that is, if he thought at all about it—and went in. The tea was laid; and at the table, looking sorrowful, yet sweet and very calm, sat Hope Ansted.

She came forward contritely. “I hope you are not angry, Mr. Græme? I—I could not go, indeed!”

He was so astonished, that at first he made no answer. His next impulse was to snatch her up himself and carry her away from the reach of infection. His third, and most reasonable one, was to pause and remonstrate with her.

“ Child, child, what have you done ? It is useless; you must go, and this very night.”

Then, seeing that she made no opposition, except in the mute pleading of her sorrowful look, he began to think how grievously he had misjudged this girl. Quiet as her nature seemed, what heroism of affection there must be in its depths to induce her to act as she had done ! His heart melted with tenderness, even reverence, as he said, gently :

“ Dear Hope, why did you do this ?”

“ Because—I could not help it. Ah ! do forgive me !”

“ Forgive you ?”

“ Yes; for telling Reuben that though you ordered the others, you were not my brother, and had no right over me. Otherwise, he

would not have let me stay; and then I should have been so very, very miserable."

"Poor little thing—poor loving little thing," said Ninian, laying his hand on her long curls. He was deeply touched—more than Hope had ever seen him. She drew his hand to her shoulder, and leaned her cheek upon it, in a daughter-like way, or as Tinie did.

"Then you will let me stay—to be useful to you, and to nurse dear Lindsay?"

"But, my child, do you know the risk you run? If it is such that I will not expose my own sisters to it, how can I expose you? I must not, indeed."

"I do not think that reasoning holds good. Tinie, and Esther, and Ruth have all got ties in the world—I have no one belonging to me—at least, as good as none. If I took the fever and died, you know it would not signify. I should not be missed."

She said this with a sorrowful simplicity that went to Ninian's heart. He was about to answer—with an emotion strange to him

—that *there* indeed would be sorely missed the image of his lovely, winning pupil, who crept in closer every day ; but the very possibility struck him with intense pain. And to it was added some other inexplicable restraint, so that the thought died unuttered. He only said in a quiet way, “ You must not think so, Hope,” pressed her hand kindly, let it go, and sat down.

She took her place at the table, and began to pour out tea—in a timid, trembling fashion, for it was the ~~first~~ time she had ever done so. Once or twice Ninian said resolutely to himself, “ To-morrow she shall go;” yet it was pleasant and comforting to have her sitting there to-night, instead of being left alone in his anxiety. They talked of Lindsay, and Hope told him, in her simply-worded style, what the doctor said—what the nurse thought ; —until she contrived to leave a hopeful impression on his mind. His tea-table still seemed pleasant, and not lonely ; until he paused to remember that though the children were all away, yet he scarcely missed them.

And immediately some words of Edmund's on the Sunday night came back painfully. Was it, could it be possible, that in future time some one, any one—he still sedulously kept his mind to generalities—might come and take in his heart a nearer place than they?

When tea was over, Hope rose. "I shall not see you again to-night, Mr. Græme; I am going to Lindsay."

"Good Heaven!" cried he, brought back to the sense of all she was doing for his sister. "Do you think, child, I will suffer you? Suppose you should take the infection?"

"It is too late now," she answered—and something of the firmness which the most yielding of women have when their affections are concerned, came into her manner. "It is no use talking, Mr. Græme. If I am to catch the fever, I have caught it already; for I have been with her both night and day. And no one shall take me away from my dear Lindsay, whatever be the consequence."

So saying, she quietly walked out of the room.

For days and days she and Ninian met at their brief evening meal, talking sometimes in agonised suspense, sometimes in faint hope, according to the tidings Hope brought from the sick chamber. She spoke in grave, womanly fashion ; she seemed to have grown years older through this time of trouble, and beneath the responsibility which she had taken upon herself. Ninian ceased even to treat her as a child, and talked with her seriously, trustingly, about all things that concerned the stricken household. He owned to himself the while, that though she had not Tinie's liveliness or brilliant powers, yet there was a simple wisdom in all she did, that made him trust her more than he had ever done his pet sister.

So they passed the time, meeting but once a day ; except when, each morning, Ninian came to poor Lindsay's door, which he was forbidden to enter. He resisted not the pro-

hibition, for his life was not his own, but belonged to those unto whom he had devoted it. Thus, he was content, ere he left each day, merely to meet Hope on the landing—she would not let him approach nearer—and receive from her the critical tidings.

“ You would not deceive me, child?” said he sometimes, when his anxiety was insupportable. “ You will promise, that if anything goes wrong, I shall see my sister?” And Hope, to soothe him, would take upon herself a womanly strength, quite different to her former girlish submission; telling him how wrong he was to make himself so wretched, when there was hope for Lindsay, since her fever had been of a far less dangerous character than was at first feared, and she would soon be recovering.

At last the news came that all danger had passed, and Our Sister would soon be herself again. “ But you must not see her yet—indeed you must not. It is a terrible thing—fever; we must keep you safe, Mr. Græme,”

cried Hope, speaking excitedly and hurriedly.

Ninian looked alarmed. "But what is the matter with *you*?" said he, approaching, as she leaned over the balustrade to speak with him. "Your eyes are glittering, your cheeks flushed."

"Yes, yes, I could not sleep last night, for joy I think. Never mind, it is no matter. We must all be very merry now."

And she laughed, poor child, in a way that made Ninian start. "Give me your hand," he said, hurriedly. "Let me feel your pulse."

"No, no, you must not touch me, you must not come near me," she cried, drawing herself backward from him. "Go away, go away! Good-by!" She escaped back into Lindsay's room, and shut the door.

It was indeed a long good-by. She was missing at tea that night, being exhausted with watching, the servant said. Next morning Ninian was at the staircase—their sorrow-

ful trysting-place—but Hope did not appear. At night her shrill ravings were the first sound that met his agonised ear;—she also had taken the fever.

CHAPTER VIII.

LINDSAY recovered fast, but for a long time her faithful young nurse hovered on the verge of death. On Hope, as on many who have caught infection from their self-devotion to others, the fever seemed to have seized with tenfold violence. There was but a hair's-breadth, the physician said, between this frail young life and eternity. Then, in his agony of fear, even remorse, as though he had been the cause of all, Ninian found out how closely round his heart had twined "that child," as he called her still. *How* he loved her, whether as a child or as a woman, he never paused to think; but that he did love her more intensely than he had

ever dreamed, was most true. He knew it, because he felt that her life was as his life, and that her death, or the very contemplation of such horror, would make the world so black that he dared not look upon it.

Still, he called her "the child," and "my child," nor made any secret of the wretched anxiety which consumed him: the reserve of passionate love had not yet come. He never tried to hide from Lindsay what he suffered; nor abstained from haunting Hope's door, as he had before haunted his sister's. But when, after the crisis, the first glimmer of hope came—when, listening through the open door, he heard one faint tone of her natural voice, and not those frightful ravings—the revulsion of feeling was such that at last it taught him concealment.

He spoke not a word—he could not speak; but walked down-stairs, and out of the house. There, in the darkness—for it was so far in the night as to be nigh upon dawn—he stood under the starlight, hearing the rustle of the trees. His throat swelled—his heart

seemed bursting. With a strong gush of passion—the strongest his life had ever known—he threw himself on the earth, and among the damp, dewy grass, fell more than one tear, wrung from his manly eyes.

Long time he lay, watching the little stream of light from the one window in the gloomy house—watching, and feeling that he could not go to rest; he could only sit there, forgetting everything on earth, except that “the child’s” life was saved.

Lindsay was quite well, and had resumed her household duties, ere poor little Hope was able to quit her chamber. When, at last, she was moved into Miss Graeme’s dressing-room, and Ninian saw her for the first time; he marvelled to perceive how illness had changed her, bringing into her young face a womanly expression—a thoughtfulness which had never been there before. Over the stillness of her beauty flitted shadows of the awakening heart.

Ninian had thought, and Lindsay too, that his first impulse would be to embrace his

pet, his pupil, his darling child, restored as it were from the grave. Even Hope seemed to expect it, for, smiling, she half-lifted her feeble head to meet the kiss she had often shared with Tinie ; and, not receiving it, had looked disappointed a moment, until she saw how much Ninian was moved.

“Indeed, Mr. Græme, I am not worth your caring for me so much—you and Lindsay,” the poor child said, faintly. “What trouble I must have given you! It seemed almost like being punished for disobeying you, and not going away with the others.”

“I wish you had—I wish you had!” murmured Ninian.

“I don’t, though!” And she looked up at Lindsay, who stood on the other side of her sofa. “I think, putting all things together, I have never been so happy in all my life.”

It might be true. Sickness is very often restful and sweet ; and trouble that awakens or draws together affection, is scarcely trouble at all.

"That is rather hard, my love," said Lindsay, in playful reproach. "To have felt happy, when Ninian and I, not to speak of the poor children away, have been all breaking our hearts for you!"

"Breaking your hearts? Ah, then, I'll soon get well, and piece them together!" Hope answered in the same light strain—there seemed such brightness let in upon her life. "I must—I must get well, that we may all go to the Clyde, as Mr. Græme says. If I could only come down stairs now."

"Foolish child! when you cannot even stand."

But the sickly longing for change would not be restrained. So the next day it was agreed that she should be taken to the quietest room in the house—Ninian's study. He spent an hour or two clearing its dusty shelves, and making it pretty for the poor invalid's eyes. And, though he was not much given to fanciful tastes, or bits of sentimentalism in the floral line, he even took the trouble to arrange flowers among the

wormeaten bookcases. Nay, he actually paused to admire them,—the white jasmines leaning their bonnie heads against the law-books; like the delicate little creature that was about to be domiciled in his dusty old study.

He went at length to carry her down stairs. That was the most brilliant part of the plan; Hope had even made an attempt to clap her hands in Tinie's fashion, when Lindsay proposed it, though she afterwards recollected herself, coloured slightly, and was afraid it was troubling Mr. Græme too much.

But Ninian looked so pleased to see her childish delight, and told her gaily, "that he would carry her from thence to Constantinople, if it would do her any good. Besides she was such a little light creature—a mere feather to a great powerful man like him." And for once in his life, Ninian looked with some little pride at the reflection of his fine manly person in the mirror.

"I'm strong, if I'm no bonnie," said he,

laughing. "You are not afraid to trust me with your valuable little self, Hope? You know I am only going down stairs—not up to the top of a mountain—you remember that story we once read of the German princess being carried up a hill by—by—" He broke off in his sentence, but Hope finished it merrily,

"By her lover—was it not? And he died on the top, poor fellow! Truly I am glad the journey is only downstairs, for I should not like to kill my kind guardian as she killed her lover."

Ninian was silent.

"I have not vexed you, have I, with turning your pet story into a jest?" continued Hope, anxiously. "You know I am not clever like Tinie, but I always admire whatever you tell me to admire."

He patted her on the head—called her a good child, and lifted her in his strong arms. But as he held her there, poor little trembling thing! close to his breast, the German story entered his mind—strangely—wildly. A

dizziness came over him, he even staggered. Hope faintly screamed.

“Don’t be frightened, my child—my love—my darling!” said he. The words—words that he had never used before, not even to Tinie, burst from him unawares; he was scarcely conscious of them, till afterwards. And to Hope, from the great difference between her years and his, they seemed quite natural.

“Never mind me—I feel quite safe—only I am so foolish,” she murmured, hiding her face so as not to see the “grim descent.” There was a curl of her hair trembling outside her shawl; with an impulse impossible to resist Ninian pressed his lips upon it. None saw the action—Hope never knew it; but it betrayed the truth. It was a kiss—the last of calm affection, the first of passionate love. He knew now that the creature he held in his arms, dear as his life, was to him the woman and not the child.

He laid her down—she leaned on Lindsay’s breast, pale with exhaustion. But he dared

not look at her, or speak to her. He muttered something about leaving "the child" to rest—went out of the room, and was not seen for hours.

Women, and especially young women, either believe falsely or judge harshly of men, in one thing. You, young loving creature, who dream your lover by night and by day—you fancy of that he does the same of you? He does not—he cannot; nor is it right he should. One hour, perhaps, your presence has captivated him, subdued him even to weakness; the next he will be in the world, working his way as a man among men, forgetting for the time being your very existence. Possibly if you saw him, his outer self, hard and stern,—so different to the self you know—would strike you with pain. Or else, his inner and diviner self, higher than you can dream of, would turn coldly from your insignificant love. Yet all this must be: you have no right to murmur. You cannot rule a man's soul—no woman ever did—except by holding unworthy sway

over unworthy passions. Be content if you lie in his heart, as that heart lies in his bosom—deep and calm, its beatings unseen, uncounted, oftentimes unfelt; but still giving life to his whole being.

Thus, Ninian Græme, the same day, the same hour that this delirium came upon him—for at all ages and under all circumstances love's wakening is ever a delirium—went as usual to his office and worked. Once or twice there seemed to come flashing round him an inexpressible light and joy. He felt on his lips the touch of the soft, soft curl; while evermore his heart sang to itself the words “my darling, my darling.”

But still he kept working on. Truly, he had in him the most royal power a man can have—rule over his own soul.

He chanced to have many visitors in his office to-day; among the rest, one who, had he been in a less joyous frame of mind, would hardly have been welcome. But he was in a mood to have felt kindly towards his greatest

enemy; he certainly did so towards a man whom he had no real cause to dislike—Mr. Ulverston.

“What, back again in Edinburgh?” said he, when that gentleman made his appearance. “I thought you were going abroad.”

“So I was, or intended to have gone this long time, but somehow, I keep on paving a certain nameless road—it is my way,” answered the young man. “But I have some excuse—business. I am sure that confounded fortune of mine has given me trouble enough in a year and a half.”

“I thought,” said Ninian, in some surprise, “that you had had it all your life—that you were one of those lucky fellows ‘born to greatness,’ as Malvolio says.”

“In a measure, certainly;” and he looked slightly confused, as proud men do who have made an unpleasant slip of the tongue. “However, I was not born to the Ulverston greatness, but had it thrust upon me! I wish sometimes, my old uncle had cut me off

with a shilling, instead of leaving me a fortune and a name," he muttered.

But Ninian had not heard ; he was answering a message at the door. " Say, if she can wait in town an hour or two, well ; if not, I will be at Musselburgh to-morrow."

" So you still keep up your journeys to that redoubtable place, Musselburgh ? I begin to think there is some reason for it. Has our young friend Forsyth any sisters ?"

" No," said Ninian shortly. Mr. Ulverston shrugged his shoulders and began talking of something else ; his disposition seemed so pliable, that he could bend himself to any one's humour. But Ninian's was almost beyond him, for in truth the young man was very busy, and Mr. Ulverston's conversation, however brilliant, was considerably hindering him. At last he told him this, in his frank way—for Mr. Græme had the kindest power of telling straightforward truths, without vexing anybody.

" So you fairly want to turn me out. That is rather too bad, when I have only a

short time to spend in Edinburgh, and shall be off by the next train to Glasgow. I am going to try and kill a month or two—likewise a few deer—in the Highlands. I fear it will be dull work, for a miserable solitary fellow like me."

"Why don't you marry?" said Ninian, smiling at his dolorous face.

"Marry! The devil! What business have you—— I beg your pardon, Mr. Græme, I suppose it is your business. It's everybody's business to get a 'man of fortune' married. I've found that out already," he added, his first angry tone subsiding into one so bitter, that Ninian felt quite sorry for him. This poor, rich man, might have suffered some hidden trouble, even wrong. The young Scotsman thought he had yielded too much to prejudice; and out of compunction, went so far as to possess himself of Mr. Ulverston's travelling intentions, unfolding his own, and even arranging a meeting on the Clyde, near the Gairloch, where the young Græmes now were

"I will not turn you out from thence, as

you say I do from my office to-day. Though indeed there is no need for you to go, if you will content yourself with a book."

"One of your stupid law-books, I suppose," laughed Ulverston.

"Nay, they are not all stupid," said Ninian, examining his shelves, "here is a volume of trials, concerning our marriage laws; it might amuse you to see how easily the bond is formed and broken in Scotland."

"Give it me—give it me," cried the other, eagerly. "Nay," and he laughed, "you don't know what use it may be to me in my 'novel of Fashionable Life,' if I ever write one."

He must, indeed have found the book interesting, for he sat engrossed therein until Ninian's hour for departure, and then with a hasty adieu quitted the office.

Mr. Græme soon followed, for he was longing to reach home—the home no longer sad, but filled with inexpressible joy. He felt, though he did not analyse his feelings, like a man who has awokened sud-

denly one morning, and found himself rich ; who stays not to count his riches—scarcely even to ascertain their reality ; but walks along under a golden mist of happiness, upon which he dares not look lest it should melt into nothingness.

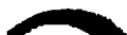
For the first time in his life, Ninian forgot an appointment ; nor recollects it, until, when near The Gowans, he heard quick footsteps overtaking him.

“ Rachel ! I am so sorry. Indeed I have no excuse to offer.”

If he had, she would not have heeded it. Her whole manner indicated the wildest excitement.

“ She has seen him, Mr. Græme. Jane Sedley has seen my husband. He has come back—he is in Edinburgh, near me, and yet I know not where to find him.”

“ Nay, be composed, lean on my arm, or else sit down a minute on this stone,” said Ninian, as they entered the quiet lane which led to The Gowans. “ How exhausted you seem !”



“ I have been walking up and down Edinburgh streets these four hours, hoping by chance to meet my husband. He is here—I know he is here. Find him for me—oh, Mr. Græme, for the love of Heaven find him !”

“ I will try—indeed I will,” answered Ninian, soothingly. “ But you must first tell me all particulars.”

“ Yes, yes, let me think a minute,” said Rachel, making a violent effort to collect herself. “ You know I forwarded my letter to Jane Sedley—he was to send there every three months for news of me: but—he never has sent. That signifies little—he had surely some good reason. Now he is come back, I shall see him again—my Geoffrey—my husband.” And she trembled all over in her paroxysm of joy.

“ But you said Jane Sedley saw him. How was that, and where ?” pursued Ninian, anxiously, for his keen common-sense pierced further than the blind love of the unfortunate wife.

“ I’ll tell you. She had come up to Edin-

burgh to see me, and to bring me back my letter. And there, driving down Prince's-street alone in a grand carriage, she saw a face like his. *It was his*—nobody could mistake my husband's face."

"Did he observe her?"

"She thinks he did, for she ran after the carriage. He did not stop to speak to her; how could he! He could not shame himself in the street, you know, talking to a poor old woman. But he had the letter—she threw it into the carriage. I fear he will be angry—still—he had the letter!—and we shall meet—we shall meet!—"

"He knows, then, where you live?"

"No, no. I mentioned neither names nor places; he always charged me not. And what were the Forsyths to him? He never heard their names, nor wished to hear. He said, since I had no near ties, all my other kindred, so far beneath his, must be forgotten as if they had never existed. And no marvel! Alas, even if we met, he might be ashamed of me."

“ Surely he would not.”

“ No; you are right. He is too noble!” cried Rachel, rising up with a proud demeanor. “ Still, I must find him; this suspense is horrible. Perhaps, even now, he may be but a street’s length from me. I cannot rest—I must go back to Edinburgh.”

“ I will go with you,” said Ninian, forgetting everything in his compassion for the poor young creature—a wife—yet no wife. “ Only let me run home for a few minutes to see Lindsay. Will you come—or are you still afraid of the fever?”

“ For myself, no! But I am not my own. I must run no danger for Geoffrey’s sake. I will stay here in the avenue.”

There, Mr. Græme left her, and hastened to the house. Lindsay met him with a smiling face.

“ The child is still keeping well. She is asleep now in the study. You may go in and look at her; but be very—very quiet.”

There was no need to tell him that. His whole nature—once somewhat cold and hard—seemed softening into inexpressible

tenderness. When he looked at the girl, lying asleep, pale and fair, he longed to take her and hide her in his bosom; bidding her nestle there like a young bird, and sit and sing, safe from all harm, all her life through. Still, he only thought of her as his darling — his cherished one — the flower he had saved from perishing. He had never yet breathed to himself the words, "*My wife.*"

He tore himself away, and went back to Rachel. Putting aside all other thoughts, he turned his mind to her service in this emergency.

She was restlessly walking about. "You are come at last. Let us start. I tell you, I must see him, or I shall go mad. Think, all this day, I have been walking—walking; every footfall, every face, I have imagined was his. I always had that fancy. Many a time I have followed down whole streets any one who was like him, or who reminded me of him, and then at last have beheld some fool's face. As if I could hope to see anywhere in the world another face like my husband's."

Ninian smiled—but it was a sad smile. He did not chafe under her wild romance, now. He began to find out that the wisest, the oldest of us, are, while beneath one mighty influence, dreamers of fantastic dreams.

But he had still power over himself, and over others, especially this poor troubled spirit, of which a curious destiny had made him the only stay. He proposed to enquire at every hotel in Edinburgh for “*Mr. Sabine*.”

Rachel started at the name, so long unspoken; but immediately a sort of pride dawned in her face. “Yes, *Mr. Sabine*. You may call him so now. It is a good name, is it not? I had need be proud in bearing it.”

With a firm step, she followed Ninian to hotel after hotel—never speaking, never lifting her veil. In apparent indifference the question was asked; she heard bandied about; screamed from attendant to attendant, the name whose mere utterance seemed

so sacred, a name distinct from all other names in the wide world. Sometimes, Ninian felt her grasp his arm tightly, but she never said a word. Save that when from each place they went away, the search still vain, she would whisper hoarsely, "Once more—only once more."

At last, even Ninian gave up in despair. No one even seemed to have heard of the name of Sabine. And in a small city like Edinburgh, where at the dead season of the year every arrival of any consequence was sure to be bruited abroad in the hotels, it was next to impossible they could have missed the object of their search.

"Either he has never been in Edinburgh, except just passing through, or else he is gone from thence. It is no use; alas! you must have patience."

"Patience!" she repeated, in a tone of agony. "Patience! oh, Heaven!"

"You say well; Heaven only can help you, my poor Rachel," answered Ninian, soothingly, but firmly, for his judgment

warned him that this was only the beginning of sorrows. Despite all the forsaken girl's faith in her husband, he who knew the world better could not repress the doubt that under this great mystery was enveloped some great wrong. They were in one of the streets which, leading out from the blaze of Prince's-street, appear at night so quiet and lonely. There he let her rest a moment; she leaning heavily on his arm, while he, unwilling to intrude on what he knew must be deep misery, stood silently watching the lights of the Old Town, with a few stars twinkling over it through the cloudy night. He was thinking how many woes and crimes lie under life's outer gloss, even as that fairy city, seen by night, is one great corrupting mass of wretchedness by day. And then he thought of the man, whoever he might be, who, perhaps, had lately rolled in his carriage down the same street where his unhappy wife now stood, crushed under the burden of her bitter sorrow.

Suddenly Rachel dropped his arm.—“There—there,” she gasped, and staggered forward. Ninian looked, and saw turning the corner of Prince’s-street the dim figure of a man, to him quite beyond recognition. But not so with Rachel: excited almost to frenzy, she darted forward—“It is he—it is my husband!”

The next moment the figure had leaped into a carriage which dashed off at full speed, and was out of sight in a minute.

“Follow him! follow him!” shrieked Rachel; but the sound died on her lips—her feet refused their office. She sank in utter insensibility. Some time after, the cold wind blowing through the avenues of The Gowans, recalled her to herself.

“Where am I? what are you doing with me?” she cried.

“You have fainted, and I am taking you in a carriage to stay the night with my sister Lindsay.”

But with a wild cry of “My husband—I

must follow my husband!" she tried to open the carriage-door. Ninian had to grasp both her hands fast, ere he could restrain her.

"Rachel, you must be calm—reasonable," said he, resolutely. "It was impossible for me to pursue a strange gentleman on your mere suspicion. Nor did I know whither he had gone. You cannot find your husband, until he shall choose. He knows not you are here. He may be at this moment employed in seeking *you*. In any case, it is no use fighting against destiny. You have done all you can—you must sit still and endure."

This was a strange homily to read to the poor creature at such a time; but Ninian knew the mind he had to deal with. There are some natures whom soothing only excites into worse suffering—their passions, lion-like, rage and roar, and can only be met by the cold, fixed control of one superior eye. In this manner Rachel was calmed.

"Endure—endure," she repeated, as if it were a new word he had taught her; and

then was silent. At length, she uttered—quite broken-hearted—the longing, “ Let me go home.”

So Ninian, perhaps inwardly relieved, changed his intentions, and took her safe to Musselburgh.

“ What must I do. Advise me what I must do?” said she, humbly, as he placed her in the care of faithful Jane Sedley. “ I have seen my husband—I know I have—nothing could deceive a wife’s eyes. Or, if you doubt me—see, this woman here—she will swear—ay, swear.”

And Rachel shook Mrs. Sedley by the arm; then, crying out, “ Ah! *she* can speak of him—*she* loved him!”—laid her head on the old woman’s shoulder and wept.

Mr. Græme turned away—there was a deep manly compassion struggling in his heart. He thought of his fair darling—his little Hope—sleeping safe at home; and then of the poor creature, but a few years older, who had suffered such a world of anguish. He thought, if ever he were to

see Hope suffer, and he not have the power to heal it, it would almost drive him mad.

Rachel came to him at last with a composed countenance. "I am not weeping now: I am ashamed that I ever did weep; but I am so young still, and one cannot be brave always. After all, I think I ought to be glad of this day and yesterday—glad to know that my husband is safe and well, that he has my letter—that we shall soon meet—yes! I know we shall."

"I fervently hope so, Mrs. Sabine."

She smiled, even happily, as he addressed her by this name.

"You will soon always call me thus, but I shall nevertheless be the same Rachel you have so guided and befriended," said she, giving him her hand. "And now good by, for a time. To-morrow, Jane and I go home together; I shall live in the cottage where my husband lived—where he will find me when he comes."

"That is right; it is just what I would

have advised. God bless you and make you happy."

"And in my happiness I shall come to The Gowans, that my husband may know and thank Ninian Græme."

Ninian replied not, except by a kindly farewell. He could not tear down the sudden palace of hope her devoted affection had reared. But in his strong rectitude he felt an involuntary shrinking from a man who could act like Rachel's husband. As Jane Sedley opened the gate for him, he could not forbear entreating her never to forsake the young wife, so helpless and so much needing help.

"I'll do all that, sir, and gladly, for Mr. Geoffrey's wife," said the woman, and truth was in her honest face. "He was a gay, cheerful young gentleman, and I liked him, that I did!—And do, for all he passed me in the street yesterday—maybe he didn't mean it though. He was thoughtless enough, but there was nothing bad in him."

"I hope not—I hope not, for that poor girl's sake!" said Ninian to himself, as he took his homeward way. Walking along through the quiet night, miles growing into nothing before his stout tread, the troubrous scenes of the day gradually melted from him, or left only a sweet sense of his own security and peace.

Coming to his own home, seeing from the window the one faint ray which marked where little Hope slept, with his kind elder sister watching near, Ninian thanked God that in this sorrowful world he yet had left to him so much happiness—so many treasures.

CHAPTER IX.

EVERYBODY knows the saying, "that the sky is clearest after a thunder-storm." And certainly, if we look back to those epochs of life, rare and few, when we can say, be it only of a week or a day, "Ay, I *was* happy!" we should chiefly find that they came immediately after times of great trouble; when we watched the grey skirts of the spent cloud slowly retiring; while around us the birds began to sing and the grass to grow, and we wakened up to life and its enjoyments like creatures newly born.

Ninian Græme had scarcely ever felt so happy as when he started with his two recovered invalids on their journey to the

West country. It was a sweet autumn day; but two or three falling leaves drifted through the carriage-windows upon Hope's lap, as they passed through the avenue of The Gowans. Ninian, who sat opposite, screwing his long limbs into most eccentric convolutions in consequence of innumerable small packages—brushed them away.

“We must not have withered leaves falling on the child, must we, Lindsay? She is to begin life anew at the Clyde, as a thorough Scottish lassie.”

Hope smiled, though with the listlessness of debility. Still, there was a faint colour in her cheek,—she made the loveliest invalid conceivable. Everybody looked at her and Ninian, as he half-led, half-supported her into the railway-carriage; and one or two young lady-travellers smiled. This made his cheek burn, he scarcely considered why, except that he had a mortal objection to appear as a “ladies' man.” But he would have done anything in the world for the comfort of little Hope.

Lindsay was not overlooked—he never did overlook Our Sister—but then she was strong now; at least as strong as she ever was, and quite able to take care of herself. Besides, her retiring nature always shrunk from being “made a fuss over;” so Hope received the benefit of all his care.

“I wish we may have the carriage to ourselves, and then the child”—Ninian seemed to take pleasure in calling her “the child”—“can recline all the way.” And he looked very black at two intruders about to advance, until he saw that one of them was his friend Dr. Reay.

“So, Professor, you are running away from town likewise. Jump in here, then—friends are better company than strangers.”

“Introduce me, Kenneth, my love,” said the Professor’s companion, a lady, plain and elderly, with that indefinable aspect known by the term of *vinegar*. Ninian quite started at hearing his old-bachelor friend thus addressed, until he remembered that the worthy man had lately encumbered

his domicile with an unfortunate poor relation. And as "Kenneth my love," with a subdued air, muttered something about "My aunt, Miss Reay," Ninian guessed that this was the lady in question. He bowed, and then shook hands with Dr. Reay, in warmer fashion even than his wont.

"And what brings you westward, Professor?" asked Lindsay, when she too had "done the polite," though in a shy way; she had rather a dislike to meeting strangers.

"My aunt wished——" began Dr. Reay; but "my aunt" interrupted, and spoke for herself.

"It was not on my account, I assure you, my dear Kenneth. But, Miss Graeme, he required change of air; he is always working in that horrid laboratory."

"Observatory, Aunt Barbara," mildly hinted the Professor.

"Well, observatory! I am sure I wonder he is alive. I, with my delicate health, could not endure this anxiety about him. So I advised him to go to the coast—with me, of

course. A great sacrifice on my part,—very great, unequal as I am to exertion; but he could not do without some one to take care of him."

" Yet I have had no one to take care of me for twenty years," said the Professor, with something between a smile and a sigh.

" So much the worse—then it is time you had. And I am sure I quite devote myself to you, do I not, Kenneth, love? He will speak for himself, Mr. Græme."

Ninian assented, he was not quite clear to what; he had been placing a cushion at Hope's shoulders, and was only dimly conscious of his neighbourhood to the sole thing which he really hated in the world—" a woman with a tongue." Perhaps one of Hope Ansted's attractions in his eyes was her being a creature who had the blessed gift of silence.

" Well, Reay, is it not pleasant to break loose into the delicious country in this way! I don't think I ever enjoyed it more," said he, as he poked his head out to look at

the grey Palace of Linlithgow. He then pointed it out to Hope, who said it was "very pretty," and lay watching it in passive pleasure, while Dr. Reay, taking up the word, learnedly began to dilate on its antiquarian interests.

"There, Kenneth, that will do; don't fatigue yourself, or over-exert your poor brain, which was to have a complete holiday, you know," broke in the indefatigable Miss Reay. "Besides, Mr. Græme probably knows as much about the place as you do, and your talk will only weary that sweet, delicate-looking young lady, his sister."

"She is not my sister," explained Ninian, slightly confused. "This is Miss Hope Ansted, Miss Reay."

"I beg your pardon, I really imagined—But if I had only considered a moment, brothers rarely appear so very, very thoughtful and attentive. Your cousin, perhaps?"

"No, neither brother nor cousin," answered Hope, looking somewhat amused.

“ I wish he were either, indeed! But you would not say he was inattentive if you only saw Mr. Græme at home. There never was such a good brother as he !” added the affectionate little maiden, stirred up to energy at last.

Ninian thanked her both in word and look. Yet somehow he was disappointed. He had thought she would have sat silent, instead of defending his cause so warmly, and he half-fancied the approbation of her eyes would have been sweeter than that of her tongue. Yet why should he regret, when she made no secret of her affection and esteem for him? Still, if she had not let it come out to that horrible woman, whom he heartily wished—in the next carriage! To escape, he turned to his friend, whom he now began to look upon as a martyr, and set him off on a discussion respecting the geological formation of the Campsie hills, which were now becoming dimly visible.

Once wound up and set a-going, the worthy

Professor never stopped. His grey eye lighted up with intellect, his massive brows rose and fell — a habit he had when talking, which showed that the wrinkles there were the impress, not of years, but intense thought. He was mounted on his hobby; and Kenneth Reay appeared then, and then only, a happy man. Ninian likewise, though he never talked much, was a pleased listener; but his ear occasionally wandered to the conversation on the opposite side, where sat Hope and Lindsay, with the Lady of the Tongue between.

“ So, Mr. Græme has many brothers and sisters ? No wife, I suppose ? ”

“ How should he want one ? ” said Hope, smiling at the bare supposition. “ His sisters all take care of him—even I help sometimes, don’t I, Lindsay ? We couldn’t let him marry. Besides, he would never think of such a thing as falling in love ! At his age, too ! ”

“ Hope, my dear,” said Lindsay, roused from the quiet silence into which she usually

fell on any change from home, she who so rarely stirred abroad. "Take care not to over-exert yourself. Do you know you are talking almost as fast as Tinie?"

"Because I feel so glad, so merry. This seems like a journey into fairy-land to me, who never used to go anywhere. But," she added, watching her guardian's eye, tender, though serious, "perhaps I talk too much. Did I interrupt?"

"No, no! Be blithe and happy, my child," was Ninian's low answer, as he turned back to the Professor and his geology, feeling rather painfully, that it was perhaps best suited to him, or he to it, "at his age." He *was* getting old.

But though he ceased to watch the child —fancying he was almost a check upon her pleasure—he, nevertheless, heard every word that fell from her lips. Few they were, for her unwonted gaiety was soon suppressed by lingering feebleness. When they reached Glasgow, she appeared so much exhausted that he proposed they should rest there for the night.

"No, no, I want to get to the journey's end. I want to see Tinie and the rest," she said, beseechingly. So they took her down to the Broomielaw, but she could hardly stand, and grew quite dizzy, poor little thing, at the sight of the gangway by which she had to descend to the steam-boat.

"Would you like me to carry you as I used to do?" asked Ninian, hesitating.

"Ah—yes!" She put her arms round his neck, and once more he held his little darling, his "wee birdie," safe in his breast. But she knew not how his manly heart throbbed—with tenderness infinite—with dawning passion—with a vague fear of things to come, that made him clasp her close as if to feel that now at least the child was his own—all this she knew not, nor ever knew.

He carried her to the stern of the boat, and made her a charming couch of plaids. There, when Miss Reay had vanished into the cabin to be seen no more, and the Professor, left to Miss Græme's universal kindli-

ness, was labouring to inform her mind on as simple a subject as his own could furnish—viz., the geological and antiquarian history of Dumbarton Rock,—Ninian sat beside Hope Ansted, sometimes talking, sometimes idly watching the waves of the blue, broad Clyde, that each minute grew broader and bluer in their sight. They were neither of them inclined to be romantic—and certainly there was nothing ultra-poetical in a Glasgow steamboat. Ninian sometimes pointed out the scenery opening on either shore with—“Is not that beautiful?”—and Hope, lifting up her weary head, tried to look pleased and admiring. As the evening shadows grew over the river, and the dim, purple light in the west showed him Hope’s face, thin and wan, yet so peaceful, contented, and sweet, he began to feel as if there were nothing in the world but himself and this child, who had so crept into his circle of happiness, rounding it all, and making it as though it had never been complete before.



He did not quite understand his feelings. He was not sure that he loved—this tenderness was so different from any of his boyish fantasies and frenzies; but he felt as if he should like to sit as now, with Hope's hand in his, floating down the still river eternally, with the great hills looking on. Or else he longed to take the child in his arms once more, and go with her over those hills to some hidden paradise, where there were no such things as law-courts, and law-papers, or worldly cares of any kind—where no one might enter but their two selves.

— He had forgotten all about his brothers and sisters ! He had pictured a paradise which could only be shared between himself and—*his wife*. He had dreamed of things, possible and probable to all outward seeming, but which he in his strong, righteous heart, sternly fulfilling the vow he had made, knew to be utterly impossible !

With these thoughts, not clearly defined, indeed, yet still dimly rising in his brain, Ninian met his family.

The whole train—a goodly train, too—were gathered on the shore of the Gare Loch. The twins, looking grave and matronly enough to justify the trust placed in them as guardians of the little troop, were there with a quiet welcome. Tinie danced about in her ancient fashion; Edmund, keeping close to Lindsay, seemed scarcely able to express his joy; while Reuben and Charlie, bounding hither and thither, shouting orders to boatmen, and contending over luggage, were still, as ever, the noisiest and most jubilant of all.

“Oh, how nice this is!—how cosy we are!” was all that Tinie could say, when the family were assembled in the parlour of their little cottage. It was a family group only—for Hope had been despatched at once to bed, by Lindsay’s thoughtful care. Ninian wondered that no one seemed to miss her much—no one but he; however, he said nothing, except that when his sister reappeared he asked “How the child seemed after her journey?”

“What makes you call her ‘the child?’

She is no more a child than I," remarked the pertinacious Tinie, settling herself as of old at her brother's knee.

Ninian laughed, pulled her hair, and inquired how long it was since his small pet had grown into an elderly woman? Then gathering his little flock in a circle round the fire—welcome enough that chill autumn night—he began to talk and to listen.

In a large family, especially one of unity and affection, individual feelings have less opportunity to be indulged or developed. They become merged in the great whole. If ever we hear of men or women, in whom one consuming passion, be it of ambition, fame, or love, eats away existence, we generally find them to be those whom fate had set apart for a solitary life. The "family feeling" essentially modifies the egotism of individual emotion. Realities subvert vain dreams—habitual affection supplies the place of passion; and when the one overpowering love does come, it is guided and

reined in by other sentiments, inferior, but still intense. The individual impelled to bow before the controlling power, does it in a Christian, dignified manner; not lying feebly down, Bramin-fashion, before his idol's car, to be crushed into dust by a god of his own creation.

Thus Ninian Græme, when he saw himself once more among his own home circle, looked round on their young faces, listened to their mirth, the old familiar pleasures came over him—his vague dream vanished, at least for the time, and he felt only as the loving elder brother, cherished and revered—the Head of the Family.

“Certainly, as Tinie says, this is ‘nice!’” exclaimed he, stretching himself in the arm-chair, which, as usual, had been assigned to him; “I declare I am glad we came on alone and left the Reays at Greenock, though the Professor seemed disappointed, poor fellow! Dreary enough was his former bachelor life, but I think he will find an aunt-ridden

existence somewhat worse." And Ninian amused his brothers and sisters with an account of their journey, and a not over-flattering, but still good-natured sketch of Miss Reay.

"All women are disagreeable enough, but old maids are the most horrible creatures under the sun. To think that one of the species is coming to live beside us!—I shall go on a pedestrian tour, or bivouac far up in the Argyle Hills," said Reuben, indignantly.

"Or else go and live with Mr. Eneas MacCallum, and I'll row across the Loch to see you every day. Somebody will like that, you know," said Tinie, with a mischievous twinkle in her bright eyes; to which Reuben politely responded with, "Don't be a fool," and the grave twins with a duet of "Oh, for shame!"

"Here's a nice little mystery," cried Ninian, much amused. "May I be allowed to inquire who is Mr. Eneas MacCallum?"

Thereupon arose a chorus of "I'll tell"—

"No, 'let Tinie"—" 'Tis all the boys' foolishness," &c. &c., which made Our Sister look quite uncomfortable. And in process of time came out the alarming fact that, despite the proprieties vigilantly maintained by the twins, the family had made an acquaintance, contemptuously christened as "Tinie's beau;" a stout, wealthy Glasgwegian, who pursued her and them with every conceivable attention, and against whom all the three brothers were up in arms.

"They lead me such a life, you can't tell," said Tinie, piteously. "Reuben lectures me all day over; and if we walk out, Edmund tucks me under his arm till my poor wrists ache with reaching up so high. Little Mr. Eneas would be a great deal more comfortable."

"Tinie! you are incorrigible," muttered Edmund, roused out of his dreaminess into a positive frown.

"I assure you, brother, it's no fault of mine," pursued the wilful damsel, looking absurdly demure. "I can't help people's admiring me, and Mr. MacCallum is a very

nice little man; he has been most civil to all the boys; and even Esther confesses his mother to be a douce, kind sort of a body. Besides, their house at Roseneath is beautiful."

"And you would greatly like both the house and the mother, wouldn't you now? together with that stupid, roly-poly, vulgar little fool?" cried the indignant Reuben.

"Come, come! that's rather too hard," interposed the elder brother, as he saw his pet's flushing cheek. It made him feel uncomfortable for a moment, lest there might be some truth at the bottom of the children's nonsense. To try it, he said, quietly glancing a meaning look across to Lindsay, who seemed in a state of most alarmed suspicion. "Well, I must see this grand hero, this conquering Eneas of Troy—that is, Glasgow. Of course, now I am come, he will direct all his attentions to me. But I will not interfere. Miss Tinie may please herself."

"Do you mean what you say, brother

Ninian ?" said Tinie, her merry little face becoming rather grave.

" Certainly."

" And would you actually let me go ? Do you want to be rid of me ? Would you really have me married ?"

" If you wished it so very much !" answered Ninian, growing mischievous in his turn.

" And married to that fat, awkward lump of insanity ?"

" 'A very nice little man,' " you said.

" And send me to be smoked to death in that horrid Glasgow, among people who have no more brains in their heads than you or the Pro—— or any of our friends at home have in their little fingers ! I wonder you could ever think of such a thing, brother Ninian !" cried the little maiden, absolutely getting into a passion.

At which indignation the elder brother was rather pleased than otherwise ; and as he calmed the diminutive tempest he had raised, he felt that it would indeed be a

most unpleasant thing to give away his pet sister to any body.

So the family sky being again clear, he began to enter into their various plans for the best spending of this little holiday. "It must now be brief to all," he said, candidly telling them how heavy this year's expenses had been upon his small income; "but though he himself must return in a few days, the rest should stop as long as he could possibly manage it, for the sake of Lindsay's health, and that of Hope."

"Ah, poor little Hope, how kind you are to her, too; there is nobody like my brother — so generous — so self-denying," murmured the affectionate Tinie.

"*Generous—self-denying.*" The words jarred upon his honest spirit, as if there were in him something of deceit, which made him unwilling to meet his sister's eyes. He did not speak again of Hope Ansted.

But when the little party was dissolved, and he himself left to fulfil the unpoetical master-of-a-family duty of bolting all the

doors, he stood a minute or two outside in the garden, meditating.

It was "a goodly night," a night that would bring instinctively to every thoughtful man the deepest feelings of his soul, awakening any secret hidden there, which the habit of daily life glosses over and presses down into insignificance. Ninian stood and looked at the broad dark Loch, with the stars overhead; at the wavy line of hills beyond, brightened by a dim auroral light. A sense of solitude, of unrest, oppressed him; with it, came a longing for some tie closer than that of kindred; some love which should be about him continually, engrossing both soul and sense, giving him those emotions without which existence often declines into blank selfishness, making him acknowledge, as some wise man says: "That to be the husband of a wife and the father of a child, is to rise to a higher place as citizen of God's universe."

He thought how it would be, if instead of standing there by himself, he stood and felt

arms twining round his neck, closer than Tinie's ever clung. Or if, climbing up to his stalwart breast and hiding there, were small winsome creatures—a baby-girl nestling to her father with shy sweet eyes—or a sturdy boy, riding on knee and shoulder, blotting out from the young man's heart all its past griefs, broken dreams, or erring follies, and causing it to swell with a new pride—“This is *my son!*”

It was the first time Ninian had clearly thought of these things. He was not a youth wrestling with a vague love-dream; he was a man, to whom with all its bearings near and remote the passion came—or at least was coming; not madly, but with a force silent and deep as his own nature. All he had put from him—the ties of husband and father, the sweetest tenderness, the strongest pride a man can know—began to dawn upon him with a regret keen and sore, though formless still. Ere it took form, he felt that he must fly from it.

He turned his eyes from the sky, over

which, cast by the yet unseen moon, was floating a light, soft and serene as a virtuous woman's love: he shut his ear to the ripple of the tide, rising among the stones of the beach with a sound like little children's laughter. He went in—bolted and barred the door even as he had closed the bars of his own heart—and so passed into his chamber.

CHAPTER X.

To sleep after seven A.M., when the shores of the lovely Gare-Loch were glowing in the brightest September morning that ever dawned, was certainly a deadly sin. Charlie and Reuben evidently considered it so, for they hallooed incessantly at every one's door until the whole family were ready for breakfast. Soon afterwards, so early that it was almost incredible, appeared, coeval with the first boat—Professor Reay.

“And without his aunt! Oh dear, what a pity!” cried Tinie, as she ran through the garden, all bonnetless, to open the gate. At which condescension Dr. Kenneth looked an innocently happy man, though he found it

quite impossible to express his delight in any way than by informing the inquisitive little fairy half-a-dozen times over, "that he was come to look for lodgings."

"He look for lodgings!" said she, publishing the fact, "why, he would not know a decent cottage from a Highland hut. He has no notion of anything in the world—he would be cheated on every side—he always is."

"I suppose so," said the learned man with a half sigh, as he turned from the merry maiden's shower of banter to his friend Ninian, who stood looking at the beach, where the three boys were pulling up a cockle-shell of a boat. Therein Hope was to take her first "water-airing," as her guardian had whimsically expressed it, when persuading her to the same. She came beside him, her cheek already rosier with the pure breezes from the Loch, watching the boys' movements in undisguised delight. Ninian cast one look on the beautiful face; his own grew troubled—he walked to the other win-

dow, and resolutely tried to compose his mind sufficiently to argue with the Professor concerning the tidal peculiarities of the Firth of Clyde, and at what period of pre-Adamite history the Gare-Loch, Holy-Loch, Loch Long, &c., were likely to have been formed.

“ I never knew such an atrocious waste of time,” cried Reuben, entering with a dignified rebuke. “ Edmund and I have been sitting half an hour on the edge of the boat, and the girls won’t come. Who is ready, and who isn’t? or else we will shove off and leave you all !”

On which summons there arose a division in the family, as to who was to go with Hope, and who was to wait until the Professor and Miss Græme returned from their cruise after lodgings. Ninian was, as usual, the ruling arbiter.

“ The Twins are the steadiest of you all —let them take care of Hope. Reuben and Edmund will row.”

“ And not you ?” said Hope, timidly. “ I thought you would go too.”

"No, my dear, I have letters to write," he answered. No one ever opposed Ninian when he spoke in that peculiar, resolved way; so Hope patiently turned to the Twins, and took hold of Ruth's arm; but she walked feebly, and coming to the rough beach, Ninian saw her pause, evidently quite alarmed at the prospect before her.

"Those careless boys! they forget the child has been ill;" muttered he, as he went down to the shore, and helped her across the sand and sea-weed into the boat. Hope clung to his hand.

"I wish—I wish you were going! I never was in a thing like this before, and I feel half-frightened," she whispered, looking across the broad water, as if it were an abyss of horror impossible to pass.

"You foolish English lassie," said Mr. Græme, smiling, "we must teach you better. You will soon get accustomed to our Lochs. Indeed you are quite safe; the boys are good rowers, and very careful."—A fact slightly controverted by their being at this moment

struggling who should get a particular oar, until Edmund was tilted out of the boat, nearly capsizing it, and getting wet up to the knees besides.

“Nay, boys, this will never do,” said the elder brother, as Ruth and Esther began loudly to complain, and intreat him not to leave them. Hope seemed too frightened to speak, but she looked up imploringly to Ninian, whose arm she had instinctively clasped. He paused a moment, and then took his seat beside her.

A push or two from Edmund’s oar, as the boy stood up, displaying somewhat proudly his graceful figure, now growing muscular and strong,—and off flew the little craft. Certainly the poets are right when in their descriptions of Paradise, or any paradisaical sphere of being, they invariably contrive to introduce a boat. Tasso, in his voyage of the Two Knights—Dante, in his vision of the Angel-guided bark—Shelley, in his Revolt of Islam, where the “spirit-winged boat” bears Laon and Cythna to the land of im-

mortality,—do but slightly idealize upon a reality as near approaching the Elysian existence as we stupid mortals can conceive.

“Well, brother, is not this delicious?” cried Edmund, as he paused to dip his bared arms in the water, shaking back his curly hair, and showing his brown face—no longer pale and poetical-looking, but ruddy with all the health of early youth.

Ninian assented, with an admiring glance at his brother, and thinking in his own mind that Lindsay was right when she declared her boy to be the bonniest laddie that ever was seen. Reuben, labouring vigorously and merrily at his oar; Esther, sitting in rather grave solitude at the bow; and little Hope, resting at the bottom of the boat with her head on Ruth’s lap, made up a freight of perfect happiness.

Half closing his eyes, Ninian sat listening to the lapping of the water at the keel, which Edmund, much to his younger brother’s scorn, declared was exactly like

the sound of a kiss—a mermaid's kiss, of course. The boat appeared literally to float in sunshine—so glittering were the waves of the Loch—so intensely bright was the sky. Even the mountains seemed asleep; scarcely one cloud-shadow glided over them. The oars fell into the water with an even, monotonous, lulling sound; everything else was quite still. Ninian gave himself up to a dreamy calm of delight—there seemed over him a sort of golden haze through which all his life's realities, bitter and sweet, were seen afar off like shadows. Only once, when a passing breeze blew one of Hope's long curls across his knee, and without thinking, he began to twist it round his fingers, he was conscious of a feeling which many of us have at a time when our cup of happiness is full—so full that we dread lest the next breath may dash it from our lips. He thought, if that same hour—that same moment—with the sky so sunny, and the waves so clear—the boat could go down—down, swift as lightning, only giving him

time to take the child in his arms, that in death he might hold her there, sleeping safe at the bottom of the blue Clyde,—perhaps such an ending would be the best thing he could wish for!

He was roused by a slight cry from Esther, and the near threatening of the very calamity he had been contemplating,—occasioned by Reuben's eagerness after the pursuit of marine zoology.

“I've got it—I've got it,” he cried, nearly lurching the boat over to stretch his oar towards a beautiful Medusa. But the fairy thing went floating by—Happiness herself is not harder to catch than a live Medusa! However, the attempt produced great fun, and much laughing over Hope's ignorance; she had never even heard of such an animal. Consequently, Ninian, in his desire to inform her mind, held her round the waist, while she leaned over the boat's side, dipping her hand in up to the very elbow, with a vague notion that she should thereby catch something. And her laughter was so blithe, so thoroughly

infantile in its joyance—that Ninian thought what a simpleton he had been, to dream such dreams, and make such stern resolves concerning a mere child! He was a grown man, old enough to be—not exactly her father—but something very like it ; she was his pet—his darling ; he might still keep her as such, and be happy, without blame.

So he cast off the silence which had hung over him, and began to amuse the rest, which Our Brother so well knew how to do. And as their laughter—even Hope's, rang over the sunny river, he thought that after all to enjoy life on the surface of the Clyde, was better than sleeping ever so sweetly in death at the bottom.

Their sail was not intended to be long, for over them hung the grim shadow of Miss Reay, who was to appear soon after noon. “We must be at home then,” observed the conscientious Esther, and Ninian agreed thereto, though he felt as if he could gladly have sailed on to eternity down the beautiful Clyde. This being impossible, he

steered the wee boat round by Roseneath Bay, remarking to Hope, that “that was the place where Jeanie Deans landed, the land of MacCallum More.”

“ Oh, I know all about the gentleman,” said the ignorant little maiden, with a sly smile. “ Tinie told me the whole story of him and his house, and his mother, before we went to sleep last night.”

“ She means that hateful Eneas, little stupid as she is !” cried Reuben, who was not more polite to Hope than he was to his sisters. “ And lo ! ‘ Speak of the deil,’ &c. Mr. MacCallum’s there !”

Ay, so he was, wading up to his little fat knees along the beach, and vociferating with all his might.

“ Crouch down, Hope, he’ll fancy you are Tinie. Oh, how vexed he will be,” wickedly cried Edmund, who, in making common cause against the would-be intruder into the family, condescended to be more common-place and unpoetical than had ever been known before.

But the elder brother put his veto on any tricks of the sort; perhaps from a sort of tender-heartedness towards the harmless little man, whose good-tempered face became clouded the moment he neared the boat and missed his ladye-love. He was certainly honest in his adoration, and Ninian, being quite sure of its hopeless nature, could afford a little benevolent pity. So MacCallum More—as, in memory of Hope's blunder, he was henceforth christened by the family—was taken into the wee boat, and safely landed in the presence of his idol.

Tinie was indeed a complete magnet to the other sex; they seemed to follow her everywhere. She appeared at the landing-place, attended not only by the poor faithful Professor, but by another gentleman, the very opposite of Kenneth Reay in outward seeming.

“Mr. Ulverston, you see! He has just landed at the cottage, and waited for your return,” said she, with a somewhat shy look at her brothers, and a malicious one at that un-

fortunate Eneas, whose smiling face grew dark the minute he saw her hanging on a stranger's arm, and making herself quite at home there.

"Who is Mr. Ulverston?" whispered Reuben, already beginning to frown. "A friend of yours, Hope?"

Hope turned languidly round, but meeting Mr. Ulverston's gaze—the sort of gaze he always directed at pretty girls—she blushed deeply.

"Your two sisters, Mr. Græme, of course? The likeness is sufficient," said he, bowing to the twins. "This lady I think I have seen before—I cannot exactly tell where."

"Mr. Ulverston—Miss Ansted," was Nianian's brief introduction, without any explanation. But he saw Hope's blush, and heard her whisper to Tinie something about the "railway station." She had not forgotten that incident, apparently. Involuntarily he looked at Mr. Ulverston, who was busy making acquaintance with the boys—his gay winning face, his manner—*empressé*, yet not

forward—his speech and mien so unmistakably that of a gentleman! Somehow, when Ninian saw his sisters and Hope smiling together, he wished he had not given so warm an invitation to Mr. Ulverston.

But the latter seemed determined to make himself agreeable. He helped to drag the boat ashore, thereby ruining his delicate kid gloves for evermore; and then began joking with Tinie, who evidently was bent on monopolising the attentions he appeared quite willing to give. Leaving the beach, he offered one arm to her and another to Ruth; they went on laughing together, while Esther slowly followed with Hope.

“I remember that little damsel,” was his sole remark concerning the latter. “Why did you not say you knew her, Græme? By Jove, she is a lovely girl, but seems *so* quiet.”

Ninian made no reply to this communication—made carelessly, in the intervals of playing the agreeable to all the Miss Græmes

in succession; a position of universal admirer which no one seemed more calculated to fill than the young stranger. Moreover, his attentions, spread so extensively among the whole family, quite reassured the elder brother, who began to catch the infection of Mr. Ulverston's gaiety.

"I don't know how I shall find house-room for you all," said he, smiling, when, added to the party there came Lindsay and Miss Reay. "You can never all dine in this wee parlour; suppose we seize our provisions—journey away, and make an encampment among the mountains?"

"Or," cried the boys, who seemed to have grown terribly aquatic in their propensities, "let us take to the boats; we can get two, and sail away round the foot of the Loch to Ardmore, dine there, and come home by starlight."

"Delicious!" responded Mr. Ulverston, on behalf of the whole; looking round as if quite satisfied that his pleasure would

be found the ruling pleasure. Everybody echoed him but Hope, who looked doubtfully to Ninian.

“Are you afraid?—will it tire you?” said he, going up to her. Somehow, in the presence of a man of the world like Ulverston, he could not say, as usual, “my child.”

“Oh! we will take the greatest care of Miss Ansted. She must not refuse, indeed she must not,” pursued Mr. Ulverston, following him. “So

‘Come o’er the sea,
Maiden with me,’

as my great countryman says.”

“Your countryman! I thought you were English,” said Ninian.

“I was brought up in England, but my father was an Irishman,” he answered, somewhat hesitating, as if he were rather ashamed either of the country or the paternity.

“Yet Ulverston is an English name,” broke in Miss Reay, utterly unable longer to hold her tongue. “When I was in England,”—the grand Hegira of her exist-

ence, it seemed—"when I was in England, I heard it more than once. There were the Ulverstons of Devonshire—respectable, very—but poor: the young Miss Ulverstons of Cheltenham—Sir Peter Ulverston of Hartland Hall. May I ask to which of these families you belong?"

"To all and any of them, madam," was his answer, smoothing his slight frown into a bow and smile of great suavity, which made Miss Reay confess privately, "he was the nicest young man she had ever seen."

He followed up his attentions by handing her into the boat, and making double use of her—converting her plaid into a comfortable cushion for himself—and leading her into such a flood of reminiscences of her English life, that no further opportunity occurred for remarks on his own family or nation.

In the other boat, the wee one, Ninian rowed a quiet freight—his eldest sister, the Professor, and Hope. None of the party talked much. Hope lay—her lips parted in

silent pleasure—looking sweet and fair. Her slight “young ladyisms,” her little follies, only appeared in Tinie’s company; with her guardian she was always quiet, gentle, grave.

There was a general gathering on the beach of Ardmore. Such fun—such laughter—such scrambling among the slippery rocks and beds of dulse; Mr. Ulverston and his wondrous politeness being in constant requisition to aid unwary footsteps. He was the life of the whole party, with his unfailing gaiety—his brilliant talk—nay, even his songs—for he turned out to be one of the few singing-men who can give a pathetic song without appearing sentimental, or a comic ditty without making buffoons of themselves. And while he was pouring out his rich voice in some old songs, there suddenly came over him a cloud of such heavy gloom, that it awoke the compassion of the only one of the girls who did not seem fascinated by him—Hope Ansted.

“I don’t think that man is quite as happy

as he seems. I feel almost sorry for him," said she to Lindsay.

"It is the Irish nature—cloud and sunshine—gaiety and gloom," answered Ninian, who always happened to be holding close watch over his late invalids; while the rest of the party disported themselves as they chose. "You will see; he will be merry again in a minute."

And so he was; yet with occasional relapses into the pensive melancholy which interests all tender-hearted young girls to a marvellous extent, until they find how much nobler is that brave manliness which baffles fate, and shows to the world a quiet aspect, unmoved and serene, whatever lies beneath. So, now and then, Hope's gentle eyes wandered in the direction of Mr. Ulverston; and her beauty, softened by a feeling of pity, appeared more interesting even to him. More than once, he stopped in the middle of a shower of witticisms to move nearer to her, and converse in a serious tone, as if, with his quick tact, he saw at once that

the pathetic side of his character was the one more likely to harmonise with hers.

“Here is a Robinson Crusoe picture—a colony in the desert. Will you go with me and see it, Miss Ansted?” said he, bounding back from a little journey of discovery he had been making among the rocks, in company with the more adventurous of the party. “It is the oddest place—a little hut built of mats and dried sea-weed—and in it there is a withered anatomy of an old woman, and such a pretty fairy of a child! It is just like a Highland edition of *Sycorax* and *Ariel*. Do come.”

Hope looked involuntarily at her guardian; he smiled permission, and she went away, Mr. Græme and Lindsay following.

“Is it not charmingly picturesque?” Ninian heard Mr. Ulverston say to Hope, “Look into the hut. It is quite a Rembrandt effect—that red firelight, with the old woman crouching down among the smoke. My infant *Ariel*, too, how very pretty, is she

not? I do adore beauty in all ranks of life!"

Hope drooped her head, smiling, as if with some dawning consciousness that this last sentence included her, or was meant to do so.

"They do not seem very miserable either, do they, Miss Ansted? One might make a little Paradise out of such a lovely solitude as Ardmore. I had once dreams of love in a desert myself."

"Then I suppose you would fall in love with that Highland beauty if she were only a little older," said Ninian, somewhat amused. "Mr. Ulverston and the grand-daughter of a poor dulce-gatherer—for I know the good woman of old. It would be a comical *més-alliance*."

"*Mésalliance!*" repeated he, as the quick blood rushed angrily to his brow. "I trust you do not imagine me capable of such folly. That would be an insult indeed."

“ Nay, Mr. Græme was only jesting,” interposed Hope, timidly, as she looked from Ninian to Mr. Ulverston, who was still chafing under what seemed a degree of annoyance quite unaccountable. Her eyes rested on the latter, perhaps with a womanly leaning toward the one whom she thought was wronged. She touched his arm, saying gently, “ Do not be vexed at Mr. Græme; we never mind his jesting speeches —never. He always means kindly.”

“ Thank you,” said Ninian, in a slow voice which expressed pain, but so slightly, that Hope perceived it not, nor turned as usual to lift up her face of innocent conciliation. And though immediately afterwards she came to his side, talking in her old affectionate way; still for hours after Ninian was haunted by the image of the young creature he so cherished—as seen in that momentary gesture of hers, gliding from him and towards another. It was the first warning of what he should feel, did that happen, which he had hitherto

not dared to conjure up in his lightest thought.

However, he thanked God,—ay, his feeling was so earnest that he positively caught himself saying in his heart that solemn thanksgiving—there was no likelihood of such a thing at present. Mr. Ulverston, after his momentary admiration—and he had looked with intense admiration at the earnest face of the young girl who was so anxious to soothe his ruffled feelings—flitted back to Tinie, who was, though not the prettiest, much the most agreeable and amusing. At which preference the wicked little maiden was filled with coquettish pride; so as to brave the piteous looks of MacCallum More, the scornful glances of her three brothers, and, last of all, the quiet retiring of Kenneth Reay. He, with a patient countenance, stole away, and was discovered at last sitting on the beach, his long legs half covered by the advancing tide, hammering pensively away at a submarine rock of curious formation.

Sweet and still sank the early September eve, with its long rich twilight. The woods of Roseneath grew black, and the Argyle mountains dim; while far down the broad estuary of the Clyde glowed the sunset, changing the dim river into hues of lilac and rose.

“Why, brother, you are growing ‘sentimental !’” cried Tinie; as Ninian stood beside the rocky ledge where with plaids and cloaks he had fashioned a comfortable resting-place for Lindsay and Hope. He stood on the rocky point, his tall figure clearly defined against the sky, his arms folded, the low sunset shining on his face, which had changed much that day, but which now wore a calm and holy expression. He was thinking, as earnest and rather grave minds like his are prone to think in such a scene and time, of the two great truths, the only truths of life—Love and Eternity.

Such a deep serenity was over him, that he only smiled when Tinie called him

“sentimental.” “Well, my ‘wee thing,’ even you yourself look somewhat subdued this lovely evening. And did I not see Mr. Ulverston take out of his P—coat pocket a book, which looked marvellously like a volume of poems?”

Mr. Ulverston pleaded guilty, and flourished Tennyson threateningly before the eyes of the little party.

“We are all tired of scrambling; let us sit down and read. There is quite light enough, for I know Tennyson almost by heart,” said he. Hearing which, Edmund, greatly mollified, looked up at the young man, observing *sotto voce* to Hope, “that he was not such a puppy after all.”

“I never thought him one,” said Hope, quietly, as she turned and listened to the reading. It chanced to be, by some one’s request—“The Lord of Burleigh.” Ulverston read well, and seemed rather proud of his reading. There was some strong feeling, too, underneath, indicated both in his voice

and countenance—at least, so thought Ninian and Hope, the only two who watched him closely. When he reached the verse—

“And a tender consort made he,
And her gentle mind was such,
That she grew a noble lady,
And the people loved her much,”

he shut the book, saying, impatiently:

“Really, I think this is the only piece of twaddle our friend Alfred ever wrote. I can’t read poetry I don’t like—I am reading horribly now. Who will finish it for me?”

“I,” cried Edmund, gladly; “I know it by heart. It was one of the poems she liked best of any.”

“She! Ha, ha, Master Edmund!”

“A friend of mine—of us all,” said the boy, colouring. But somehow Mr. Ulverston’s half-sarcastic laugh made him ashamed to mention the name of Rachel Armstrong. He took the book and finished the poem, after which they all began to discourse thereon.

“It is a true story, people say. I wonder if the Lady of Burleigh were really so sweet

a creature, and so much beloved," said Hope, just venturing to speak, in answer to the deferential kindness with which Mr. Ulverston requested her opinion.

" I believe her portrait is still in some noble hall or other; I forget where," Ninian replied. " The only thing I recollect is, that her real name was Sarah Huggins. I have no faith in the happiness of such unequal unions; they generally begin in mere headlong passion, and end in wrong or in sorrow." And he looked grave, remembering a story which he alone knew.

" What do you think on the subject, Mr. Ulverston ?" said Edmund, addressing him. He stood stamping the air-globules of seaweed till they went off, one after the other, in small volleys of sound; idle baby-play, were it not for the fierce, restless manner in which he devoted him to the occupation, as if for the mere desire of crushing something.

" What do I think? I think Lord Burleigh was a fool! He might have admired the village beauty, many a simple youth does

that. He might even have amused himself with a harmless flirtation — great honour, too, for her. But to marry her; to take a common clod and set it beside him in his ancestors' halls. Faugh ! I say he was a fool."

" A fool, perhaps, but at least an honest, honourable man," said Ninian; and his grave eye confronted Mr. Ulverston, whose angry manner changed immediately. He seemed, chameleon-like, ever to take the hue of his neighbour's mind.

" Of course—of course. Nay, we are get—too serious on this matter. I declare I am speaking as if there were rising up indignantly within me, ' all the blood of all the Howards.' But," he added, with an air of smiling frankness, " to explain my hastiness in this matter, I ought to confess that I have a friend, who once got into an unfortunate entanglement of this kind. But he shall get out of it—he shall, by Heaven ! A man cannot sacrifice his whole life to one youthful folly. You, Mr. Græme, as a man of common sense,

knowing the world, would you not say the same?"

"Not being acquainted with the circumstances, it is impossible for me to decide," was Ninian's somewhat cold answer, which fell like ice on fire upon the impetuous, variable temper of the young man.

"I believe it is scarcely necessary you should decide," said Mr. Ulverston proudly; and either moved apart—two discordant natures, which no power on earth could ever harmonise.

Ninian might have noticed him more, or perhaps given out more of his own upright mind in this matter, but that the hush of the lovely evening was upon his feelings. Sitting there, with the quiet river beyond, and beside him Hope's soft profile, drooping, delicate, and womanly, or else growing into almost spiritual beauty as it was uplifted in the twilight, he could keep up no jarring of the outside world. No romantic ecstasies were indicated in his look or manner; in fact, he scarcely said a word, except a pleasant re-

sponse now and then to Tinie's fantastic humours. But he sat quietly happy, listening to "the children's" chatter, or to one or two poems which Edmund would persist in asking Mr. Ulverston to read, until the light failed.

"We must indeed go home now," said the elder brother, rousing himself at last, and beginning to collect the little stragglers of the party, especially Miss Reay, who, in considerable ill-humour, was found sitting over the dulce-gatherer's fire—and the poor Professor, of whom, for a long time, the report had been *non est inventus*.

"Our Brother has such a keen sense of duty in small things," laughed Tinie. "He thinks we ought to go home, so go home we must. What say you, Mr. Ulverston?"

"*Je ne vois pas la nécessité*, as the French Queen answered, when they told her that poor people must live. Duty is all very well, but I never do anything unpleasant if I can help it," said the young man, shrugging his shoulders. "And when this move of your brother's will result in my being left on Helensburgh

pier, to find my way onwards by to-morrow's steamer, and leave all this fair company—really, Miss Christina, you will excuse my saying, that it *is* unpleasant."

And he looked so disappointed, that Hope, despite her evident weariness, tried to plead for a longer stay; fearful lest they might be going home on her account.

" You never think of yourself, my love—it is well you have Ninian and me to think for you. We must really go, Mr. Ulverston," was Miss Græme's decisive answer.

" Then it seems a pity that I should detain you to go round the pier; I can easily walk along the shore to Helensburgh," said he ; and, without allowing any one to oppose him, he quickly made his adieu to all except the boys and Ninian, who were down at the boats. Almost before the rest were aware of his intentions, he was seen disappearing along the beach.

" Poor young man—he is a somewhat hasty temper, I fear. I am sure I did not mean to offend him," observed Lindsay, regretfully.

"He is a great simpleton to take it as such," Tinie cried. "And Hope there looks as sorry for him as if he were a much-injured individual. Why, child, your compassion extends from an ill-used cat to a young gentleman in a bad humour. Never was there such a soft-hearted little thing."

"I don't like to see anybody uncomfortable," was Hope's meek reply, so meek, that even Tinie could not tease her any more. And as Ninian, when he heard the story of Mr. Ulverston's flight, only said, "Oh, indeed! I will call on him at Helensburgh early to-morrow," the subject soon died away.

Ere the little convoy started, it was already dusk; the stars were coming out, and from the opposite shores of the river the lights of Greenock and Helensburgh twinkled in fairy rows. All the river between grew black—a desolate abyss, awful to traverse — at least so the timid Hope seemed to think, as she drew closer to her guardian, to whom she instinctively looked in all danger. And Ninian, putting his arm round the child,

laughed at her fears, showing her the beautiful line of gold which yet barred the west, lying across the dim reach of the river. Then he pointed out the phosphorescent light made by the cars in the water—silvery showers, which Edmund declared fell exactly like the waving of a mermaid's hair—“the same mermaid that was in the habit of kissing the keel”—as Reuben maliciously added. Whereupon the young philosopher held forth learnedly on the causes of the phosphorescence seen in particular rivers or seas, until he found that nobody was listening; so, with a contemptuous grunt, he stopped.

Afterwards they all grew quiet and grave, even the singing from the other boat became fainter, or sank into a soft “Ave Maria,” or the beautiful hymn, “O Sanctissima.” Night on the wide open river, with the stars overhead, and the darkening waters below—in such a scene even the gayest spirit might well take a solemn tinge. And Ninian, still holding the child, until she ceased to tremble, and sat looking upward with a new awe on her in-

nocent face, felt his soul stirred within him. He said few words, but those few were graver and more earnest than he had ever spoken before in Hope's hearing. He spoke less as to the child than to the woman—of serious things, of this life, its duties, its sorrows, and of the life to come.

"I like to hear you," said Hope, with deep affection in her reverent eyes. "I think I should be always good if you took care of me."

A throb came, great and strong, almost rending his heart as it arose—a longing to stand alone under those stars, with Hope clasped close to his breast, vowing to her and before God, that nothing should ever part her from his care. And his resistance of both—ay, even in thought, gave Ninian the first warning pang of all he had to suffer—nay, perhaps all he had to forego.

He answered in his calm, kind voice, "Do you think so, my child?" Soon afterwards he let his arm drop from round her, though so gently that she never felt the loss. He talked

awhile with his younger brothers, then took the oars from them, and dashed the boat along with fierce sinewy strokes, as if he were sweeping against an ocean of fate—hopeless, yet struggling with unconquerable will. No clear thoughts had he either of past, present, or future—his mind was in a whirl. When at last they reached the shore, he sent his sister and Hope quickly homeward, himself lingering behind to see that the boat was safe, and to wait for the other merry crew, whose voices came faintly over the water. There was still a brightness in the west, for a September sunset is so long in dying; but elsewhere mountains, river, and sky were in heavy shadow.

With a sadder feeling than the mere closing of a happy day—though even that is always sad—Ninian stood alone on the shore of the Gare-Loch, idly counting over the hours of holiday pleasure, which in his life had been so few—the bright morning, the still, sunny afternoon, the evening so serenely fair.

Now the day had come to an end, as all things must. There floated in his brain, as a sort of dirge over its brief happiness, the burden of a poem Edmund had read at Ardmore:

————— “And the reapers reaped,
And the sun set, and all the land was dark.”

CHAPTER XI.

“TINIE, I have something to say to you. Will you come and walk with me down the shore?” said Ninian one morning. He had sat very grave all breakfast-time, reading his letters, or meditating in silence. Tinie looked almost alarmed at the “something,” except that her brother never scolded, and rarely lectured, save in the gentlest way. So she put on a brave face, took his arm, and walked with him, chattering merrily in her usual way, at least for some time.

“Christina, is it possible for you to be serious for five minutes?”

She knew he was in earnest now, for it was not once in six months that he called her

Christina. "Are you angry with me, brother?"

"No, not angry, but somewhat grave. I have received this letter, which I think you ought to read. Do so now, and then we can speak about it."

"'Tis from Eneas—the valiant Eneas! I have already had a score of his precious compositions," said she, her mirth again rising.

"I did not know that—but read this letter."

She did so, at first laughing, then gradually becoming grave. Ninian was not surprised; he himself had been greatly touched by the honest little lover's plain statement of his feelings—by the humility with which he spoke of his worldly advantages, and the manly earnestness of his appeal to Tinie's brother for the hand of his wayward ladye-love.

"Well?" said Ninian, as his sister returned the letter, and hung her head in silence.

"Yes, brother."

"Are you in earnest about this matter? I can scarcely believe it, and yet if, as he

says, you have received his letters; accepted his attentions, given him no denial in any way—is that all true, Tinie?"

She made no answer.

"Must I suppose it true, then?" said Ninian, stung with a doubt that made him scarcely bear to look on his pet sister. "You cannot really love Mr. MacCallum—you ridicule him too much. Is it to him, or to 'his wealth, that I am to give my sister away?"

"Brother!" She tore her arm from him, and stamped the sand with her little foot. "I wouldn't marry that man if he were as rich as Croesus."

"Why then did you lead him to suppose you would? Think of his letter—humble indeed—so humble it almost grieved me; yet he evidently believes that though he does not deserve you, he will win you at last. Why did you allow this?"

"Because—because—we were all so dull here, and he amused me."

"He amused you! And you have gone

on wounding the heart of an honest man for 'amusement.' I know girls do that sometimes, still I did not believe it of my sister."

Tinie kept silence, tossing her proud little head once or twice, and struggling not to cry, or rather not to be seen crying.

"How long has this been going on? I mean—not in jest, as I thought it was when I came here a fortnight ago, but in earnest, as it was on one side, at least. I wish—I wish that I had seen it before!"

"You might have seen it," said Tinie, half sulkily. "I never made any secrets about Mr. MacCallum and his visits, only ever since Lindsay and Hope have been ill, you have been too busy over them to mind me."

Ninian drew back, conscience-stung.

"Not that I am so ill-natured as to grumble at your taking such care of them," continued Tinie. "Nobody could be too kind to Our Sister: and you can't help liking Hope any more than we can, she is such a sweet little thing, a great deal

more amiable than I. Besides, as Miss Reay says, she is so fond of you, and makes such a fuss over you."

Ninian turned his face to the Loch, over which the morning sun glittered and flashed. But it was not that which blinded him, and made him feel as if everything were reeling to and fro. Only for a moment;—the next he answered—as he must answer, as he would have answered, though the words had choked him,—

"I am glad to hear that; we should all try to be kind to a girl so desolate. In her sad position, and remembering what her father is, I trust I shall always do my duty by her. However, I was not talking of Hope Ansted, but of you."

He said this, and no more, for with the effort even his strong heart failed. Tinie, ashamed of her momentary ill-feeling, answered nothing, so that the brother and sister walked on in perfect silence. In one, at least, heaven only knew all which that silence concealed!

At last Ninian spoke. "And what am I to say to Mr. MacCallum?"

"Say? Nothing! Or just tell him that I never meant anything but fun, and I couldn't think of marrying him—a comical, fat, little goose of a man. I wonder he could ever fancy such nonsense!" replied Tinie, whose light spirits revived in a brief space of time. Strangely, bitterly, they jarred upon her brother.

"Child," said he, "you have done a wrong thing. In this matter, my heart goes more with that poor man than it does with you. If, instead of your thoughtless message, I told Mr. MacCallum you were not worthy this sincere attachment of his, it would be nearer the truth."

"Tell him so, then—little I care!"

"No, I will not tell him. But I will write at once, as he entreats me—and something in his perseverance touches me, so that I shall do it more warmly than I would have done a week ago, when I thought he was a mere wealthy simpleton, beneath the least notice of my sister."

“And you think him not beneath my notice now?”

“No; because he offers you an honest heart, which, though refusing, no woman ought contemptuously to spurn. Child! you are young; you don’t know the world, or the men in it—how lightly they love, how continually they play and trifle with girls’ hearts—especially such gay, sparkling creatures as you,—and never say frankly, as Mr. MacCallum does, ‘I love you—be my wife, and I will try to make you happy.’ And if I must explain all—mind, I do it, not thinking of my own feelings in the matter, but simply fulfilling my duty towards this honest man, who has left his cause in my hands—I ought to tell you, Christina, that as the world goes, this would be deemed no unworthy offer for a girl entirely without fortune, between whom and poverty hangs only one life—mine. I say this, because I wish to lay all sides of the case before you, that at no after-time you may repent of your decision.”

This was a long, grave speech—the first of the kind that Tinie had ever heard from Ninian. She looked up a moment to see if he were in earnest—he was, indeed ; she even felt frightened at the stern lines of his face.

“Would you be glad, then, if I married Eneas MacCallum?” she asked.

“I never said that.”

“No; but you implied it. I see how it is—Miss Reay was right in what she told me—I believe it all now,” cried Tinie, the angry tears rising to her eyes.

“You believe what? Nay, answer—I must know!” said Ninian, firmly, though his face flushed.

“That some of these days you would long to be rid of us. That we—the twins and myself—ought to make haste and get husbands, ere we found we had no home in our brother’s house.”

“And you believed this? Go on—tell me all she said.”

“All! as if that were not enough! No, thank goodness! I have not yet seen my

sister-in-law. I did not suppose you would marry a mad woman like Mrs. Armstrong, or a mere baby like Hope Ansted, or——”

“Or Miss Reay herself,” added Ninian, trying to smile. “Tinie might imagine even that, when once she takes into her head such unjust thoughts of her brother.”

He was indeed one worthy the name of man, who could speak so calmly, with a voice that never betrayed one trace of the struggle beneath—the passion, the self-reproach, the love warring against other love, and the stern, iron hand of duty laid over all.

“Were they unjust? Oh, say over again that they were unjust? You couldn’t do it, Ninian; you couldn’t turn away your poor little pet, and marry her to any stupid fool that asks her—no, not even that you might take a wife yourself? Never mind what Miss Reay said—the wretch! If I had really believed it, it would have broken my heart.”

So exclaimed the little creature, pouring out her feelings amidst a shower of tears, trying to draw Ninian’s hands to her, and wonder-

ing that he stood so grave, so cold, so unlike himself, though without a shadow of unkindness or anger.

“ You will forgive me now? I would not grieve you for a moment, my own brother!—we all know what an angel of a brother you are. You will never think of marrying when we love you so much? That was what I said to Miss Reay. Tell me, only tell me, that it is so? You will never go and love some stranger, and leave your sisters alone in the wide world?”

He turned his face upward—it was very white—or else the sunshine made it seem so. He said, “ God is my witness, I never will!”

Then he sat down on a stone, and let his little sister creep to him, clasping him round the neck, laughing and crying at once, breaking off at times to murmur, “ Oh, forgive me!” “ Oh, don’t let my naughty words grieve you!” “ Ninian—brother Ninian—you are quite sure you love me better than you love any one?”

“ What—not satisfied yet?” And he tried

to look at her with his old smile, and caress her in his old affectionate way, but could not. "God forgive me!" he muttered, and once more turned his face up to the broad sky, that wore to him a brightness like marble, as dazzling and as hard. He was thankful that Tinie's tears blinded her, so that she did not see her brother.

"Yes, indeed, I am quite satisfied! I will never grieve you any more—never! Say that you are not grieved now—at least, not very much?"

"Oh no—oh no." He patted her hands, which held him so closely; and then as he rose up their clasp dissolved of itself. "We must walk on now, Tinie—at all events, I must. I think"—he faltered, as if for the first time his heart recoiled at the necessary hypocrisy—"I think you will be tired if you go further—nor shall I like you to return alone."

"I am not tired in the least, and I would like to walk with you all the way to Helensburgh."

"It will not do," said Ninian, with a faint smile. "I have business. I must send my wee sister back, now that we have talked over all we had to speak about."

Tinie looked ashamed. She waited a minute for him to recur to the subject of their earlier conversation; but he did not. He walked along mechanically, as if oblivious of everything. She said at length, timidly:

"Brother, I know how wrong I have been about that letter. Will you tell me what I must do—or will you tell Mr. MacCallum yourself?"

"Tell Mr. MacCallum what? Ah, yes, child, what we were saying. I understand!"

"You will write to him, then; tell him I am very sorry—I am, indeed—and I will never do so any more," said the little maiden, in a tone of great compunction. "For the rest, brother, you know what to say."

"Yes, yes!" He drew his hand over his eyes. "I am very stupid, Tinie, but I did not quite hear you. My head aches; the

sun so dazzles on the Loch. Tell me over again what you wish written, and I will do it at once. I rather think I shall walk to Dr. Reay's."

"Oh, don't write the letter there. Pray, pray don't tell¹ the Reays anything about it. She would think, and he would think——"

"Think what?" said Ninian, attracted by the degree of alarm expressed by his sister.

"I don't care—I don't care—not a jot! The Professor may consider me what he likes—a foolish little thing 'of the genus Papillionacca,' as I heard him say. But I don't choose that Miss Reay, knowing I have refused Mr. MacCallum, should therefore imagine—what she had the insufferable impertinence to tell me one day——"

"More confessions? Nay, wee thing! don't stammer. Let us have them!"

"She said I was trying—and you, too, in your eagerness to get me married—that—that I should be made her niece. There, you have it now! No wonder I was in a passion; no wonder I have been playing all

sorts of wild games. She shall never think I want to catch people that have all brains and no heart—dry, musty, geological, old—”

“ Nay, keep that foolish little head cool. Nobody with any sense, certainly not Kenneth Reay himself, would ever dream of such a ridiculous thing,” said Ninian, trying to reassume his ordinary manner, and to turn his mind to the things she was talking about. But he heard them and answered through a mist; they made no impression upon him. Only once more he attempted to send away Tinie, dismissing her with a smile and a jest.

“ Go home, lassie, I will keep your counsel. And don’t get into more love-labyrinths, for your sage elder brother to have to dash in and rescue you. He might get lost himself, you know.”

“ Oh, no fear! Nothing would ever bewilder brother Ninian,” cried the blithe creature, as she turned back and went singing along the shore of the sunny Gare-Loch.

Ninian shut his ears to the sound, so

mocking as it seemed. Evil, cruel thoughts hovered round his heart;—it is so horrible to see others making a light game of the things which to us are life or death! He felt almost as if he were beginning to love his young sister less. There she danced over the sands—happy, fair, the future before her unclouded by a single care; of a nature so light that even love itself became to her a toy, a plaything, to be taken up or cast down just as she chose, without troubling her happiness. While he——

“Well! It might be all the same, if she were dancing over her brother’s heart, as she danced over the sands. She would probably heed it as little!”

So thought Ninian, and then despised himself for the wickedness. He turned his feet and fled, walking rapidly, dashing over rocks and through shallow inlets of tide, trying to weary himself. Perhaps calm would come with exhaustion; or, as in the story of the poor possessed one, which haunted his fancy

strangely, “ the devil would go out of him, leaving him half dead.”

He seemed half dead indeed, when, late in the afternoon, he came to the Professor’s door. It was one of those white staring houses that glitter like rows of teeth along the Helensburgh shore. As Ninian stood still, there beat upon him the same dazzling sun. He wished it would rain, or that night would fall: he could bear anything better than having to walk perpetually under that clear, relentless light of day. It seemed like the life he would have henceforth to lead; with all the loving eyes of his household shining down upon him, entering, or trying to enter into his inmost soul, compelling him to say, “ It is warm, it is pleasant,” when all the while every ray would be burning into his brain like fiery arrows. How would he ever endure it all?

But man can endure—ay, everything that God sends. We never need quail under burdens of His laying on; we may stagger under them awhile, but they will not crush

such awful walks again. You quite frightened me when you came in, Mr. Græme. I have a great mind to go over to-morrow to tell Miss Græme all about it, and give her a long lecture concerning you for the future."

"You are very kind, Miss Reay," said Ninian, abruptly; "but it will be too late. My holiday is over. I leave for Edinburgh the day after to-morrow."

"Oh, what a pity! How sudden! It is only a few days since your sister Tinie was here with that delicate, pretty little friend or cousin of yours,—which is she?"

"Neither. My ward."

"You are rather young for a guardian—and sometimes these things end— Well, as I was saying, your sister and Miss Ansted thought you would stay a whole month, and they seemed so pleased. Surely you must have changed your mind very suddenly. Business, I suppose? Such *very* particular business is it? Anything which sisters don't exactly understand, eh?"

Ninian muttered some brief reply. The woman chafed him past endurance. He thanked Heaven that none of the girls at home were gifted with a tongue ! Yet there his poor friend sat, the picture of patience, toasting his knees at the fire, with a dull, tired aspect, like that of one stupified to sleep by the clack of a mill.

“ I half thought of asking for a bed here,” said he, in an under tone. “ But, on consideration, I will go back to the Gare-Loch. Could you not come with me ?”

“ Wait till she’s gone to bed; she always goes early. We can start then !”

Ninian was inclined to smile at the Professor’s frightened look, but he kept his countenance; only thinking, as he himself grew restless under the perpetual click-clack of Miss Reay, that there were minor evils hard to bear, and that after all there was great peace by his own fireside.

The two friends started, walking through a night which had now grown blustering, gloomy, and cold. Across the point of Rue came sweeping the mountain wind, curling

the Loch here and there into specks of white foam, that glittered while everything else was dark. The Professor walked on, striding with his long legs—sometimes silent—sometimes talking in his solemn, dreamy way, of the appearance of the heavens, the meteorology of the season, and other topics pertaining thereto. He never descended to mundane matters at all. And so, he walking with his head directed towards the stars, and his thoughts among them—Ninian trusting to him for guidance, and heeding little whither they went—it chanced that after an hour's wandering they found themselves again nearing the lights of Helensburgh.

“This will never do. We must have missed our way, and my legs are fairly worn out. Come, Reay, you and I have no fear of the Clyde by night or by day. Suppose we take a boat at the Rue, and I'll row you up the Loch?”

The Professor was quite satisfied with this—his only terror seemed to be going home. Ere long he had placed himself at the stern

of the boat, and lay contemplating a dawning Aurora Borealis, by the light of which his face was seen wearing a look of such sublime content that Ninian positively envied him.

“ You are a happy man, Kenneth. No worldly cares move you. Nature is your mother, and Science your mistress.”

“ I never knew any mother but the one, and no mistress will ever smile on me except the other,” said the Professor, with that quiet sadness which sometimes was perceptible in his manner. And then he turned once more to watch his Aurora.

Ninian used all his strength to urge the boat along, for it was late, and he knew Lindsay’s fears of old. Perhaps also he remembered that whenever he had chanced to be out longer than usual, two fair eyes—not his sister’s—were always lifted up to meet him with an anxious inquiry. He thought of them—but it was with a sort of terror; the vague terror which had of late seized him, lest by any possibility—im-

possible now—in the future which must be he himself might prove not the only sacrifice. Far over the waters he seemed to see them—the once child-like eyes, in which he sometimes fancied was dawning a new expression. Most hard, most cruel appeared the fate which made the hope of requited love, that would have been another man's joy, his own most bitter dread.

Almost fearing to near his home, he yet rowed on, putting forth all his might against the waves. But the wind rose suddenly, and the quiet Gare-Loch became a tempestuous sea, wherein the little boat was tossed about like a feather. Ninian paused upon his almost useless oars, and looked round with some uneasiness.

“I fear this was a mad freak, Reay; my strength is almost gone, and you cannot take an oar.”

The poor votary of science shook his head. He had never studied anything so merely physical as rowing. “If it were a matter of navigation, great circle-sailing for instance,”

said he, with a helpless, apologetic self-defence that was half comical—

“No, no; great circle-sailing would not assist you in getting safe through the Gare-Loch. I must trust to myself alone—under Heaven,” Ninian added, more softly, as there came upon him the grave reality that they were in no little danger; that boats had sometimes been lost on the Loch in wild nights such as this.

“Heaven forbid,” muttered he, struck by the fear, not of being drowned—he had much of that physical courage which braves death—but of all the miseries his death would bring. “Those children—my God! those children!” he thought; and all his brotherly love came back into his heart, until he wondered how it had been temporarily driven thence—how he could ever have wished, as he had done not many hours before, that Heaven would release him, without sin, from the burden of life—a life so precious, so indispensable to them.

“Kenneth, I fear I cannot hold out much

longer," said he, gravely. "If the worst comes to the worst, and we should never reach home——"

The Professor, with all his wisdom, was timid as a child. He started up in blank dismay, making the boat reel beneath his long, gaunt frame.

"Keep still, or we shall both be lost," shouted Ninian; at the terror of which warning, Dr. Reay crouched down at the bottom of the boat, without another word. Once or twice he wrung his hands, and Ninian heard him mutter something about "my books, my books!" and "she'll have them;" but it was no time for offering consolation. With all his strength the young man rowed on, as if a life was in every stroke, for so he knew it was. Each minute he felt himself growing weaker and weaker, while his fingers were almost stiffening over the oars. The heavy waves he fought through drenched him continually, for he had thrown his coat to the poor Professor, who, with his

inactive habits, always suffered extremely from cold.

“Reay, your eyes are used to the night. Can you find out whereabouts we are? I cannot see anything, it is so black.”

It was, indeed. They might have been in the open sea, so far and shadowy seemed the mountains and the shore.

Kenneth half rose, and sat down again. He was thoroughly bewildered. Mechanically he looked up, muttering something about “the pole-star,” but the sky was all one gloom. “If I could take soundings now,” added he, with a dim notion that he was somewhere out on the Atlantic——

“If you could take an oar, my good fellow, it would be of more use in saving our lives,” said Ninian, his patience nearly failing him. “Well, ten minutes more will decide one way or the other, for I am getting as weak as a child—Heavens! there it goes!”

The force of the water had dashed one of the oars out of his half-numbed hands.

“One chance less—well, God’s will be done!” And even his brave heart quailed, as, all need for exertion gone, he sat upright, rocking in the unguided boat. As a last effort, he tried to scull with the remaining oar, but his strength was too much exhausted. There had been daring and excitement in the struggle with the waves. It was a horrible thing to have to sit still and be drowned.

Despairingly he looked round, and, as if his eyes had gained an unnatural sharpness of vision, he saw the outline of the shore. They were not two dozen boats’ lengths from the little quay of stones, where day after day the young crew had merrily embarked, and merrily landed. Nay, further on, shining through the blank night, was a light.

“That must be our house,” said Ninian, hoarsely. “They are sitting up for me—poor things! If they only knew! Can you swim?” shouted he to Reay, with a wild desire of daring anything, could he only reach the shore alive.

But the Professor was no Leander; in fact, as regarded all manly exercises, he had never made use of his body at all—only his mind.

“Try!” pursued Ninian, in his uncontrollable longing. For, whenever he looked shorewards, he saw in fancy not only the light, but beneath it Lindsay’s face, and Hope’s; they usually sat up together. “Try! Leap out, and I’ll support you. I feel strong now. Rouse up, Kenneth; is not one’s life worth saving?”

“Not mine. Nobody will miss me,” was the only answer the poor Professor made. All his wisdom—all his learning, were not equal to that one simple, lowly, household bond, which makes a man hold his life precious because it is precious to another.

Ninian heard, with something of pity, even remorse. He sat down again with a muttered, “God help us!” and let the boat be drifted on by the tide.

“Are you away?” said Kenneth, lifting his head from his knees. “Take your

chance—never mind me—I'll stay in the boat."

"And be picked up, dead or alive, somewhere about the Kyles of Bute to-morrow morning. That is, if the tide is going out. Otherwise, we may drift ashore. Cheer up, old friend; we'll hold out together somehow!" And Ninian stretched out his hand in the darkness, with a grasp that would have given strength and courage anywhere. Not a word more was said on either side.

The boat rocked on—whether shoreward or not, they could not tell. That dim light glittered—now near—now distant—then vanished. It might have been a mere chance—the moving of a candle—the waving of a tree between; but it seemed to shut out hope and home. Even Ninian's courage ebbed; drawing in his useless oar, he leaned his face on his hands, and tried to say those words which the cry of human love drowns so often—“*Thy will be done.*”

It might have been minutes or hours—both seem alike at such a crisis—when he

felt the boat's keel grate against a rock. She had drifted ashore, near the head of the Loch.

"Thank God!" he said, as he had never said so fervently before. Life and strength came into him again; he leaped up, and, with his one oar, pushed and tugged until he had gained a landing. "Halloo!" he called to the Professor, who lay seemingly indifferent, at the bottom of the boat. "We're all safe now; a run along the shore, and by daybreak we'll be at home—at home!"

He shouted out the word, and then kept whispering it to himself; it was so sweet—so sweet! He dragged Kenneth along, walking as if he had never known exhaustion; not once stopping till he came to his own gate. There he paused.

"We'll not tell them all, Reay, not to-night; we'll say we lost our way—you know."

At the sound of their footsteps there was

a cry from some watchers within. Hearing it, all Ninian's strength left him; he staggered rather than walked to the house door.

"Don't be frightened, children! I am quite safe." And he sank on the sofa, unable to speak another word. The children clung round him—at least, Lindsay and Tinie; the others were gone to bed.

"His coat is all wet, and his hair. He has been drowned! I'm sure he has been drowned."

"Almost—not quite, that is—don't be alarmed, Miss Christina," said the Professor, stalking in with his white ghostly face. He had at last recovered his reasoning powers and his tongue.

Tinie gave another little scream, and rushed up to him. "You, too!—oh, what has been the matter with you both?"

Whether Kenneth objected on principle to falsification, or whether he thought past danger would win for him another of those looks of interest and tenderness, certain

it was that he forgot Ninian's injunction, and told the whole adventure to the shuddering Tinie.

"But you see, Miss Christina, your brother is come back alive and safe. And so have I—not that that signifies much," he added, in a pathetic humility.

"It does signify. I am so glad—so glad," answered Tinie, holding his two great hands, her face glowing through real tears. But before he could answer, she had flitted away, and was aiding Lindsay to restore her brother.

Ninian lay some minutes not exactly in a swoon, but in something like it. He had just consciousness enough to hear the voices round him, and to miss among them one voice, softer than any of his sisters'. He opened his eyes. No; the child was not there. Yes, surely she was! A white figure had stolen in so quietly that nobody noticed it at first.

"Hope, my dear!" said Lindsay, "I thought I sent you to bed an hour ago, and

you have not even undressed. Go back—
you will be ill—do go."

Still, she never moved from the foot of the sofa, but stood looking at Ninian, her face perfectly blanched with fear. He smiled, and held out his hand. She came and clasped it, not weeping, as Tinie did, but with a deep tenderness which she did not even try to hide. And, turn where he would, Ninian felt upon him her eyes, full of that unconscious girlish affection which a breath, a word, might doubtless awaken into love—a woman's love.

Oh, bitter, bitter strait, that what might have been his joy and crown was now an agony, a temptation, a terror, a thought to be smothered or wrestled with, as if it were an evil thing!

He did wrestle with it. Long after the excitement of the household had subsided, he, having sent them all away with smiles and caresses, lay alone in his chamber, to commune with himself and be still.

A strong, clear mind he had ever; ay,

even amidst the rack of conflicting passions, whose force he now learned for the first time. He tried to put the case before him as though it were another man's, and to reason upon it calmly, if possible.

Supposing he and Hope loved one another—it was best to seize that delirious fancy first, and struggle with it—what would be the result? To marry, and add the cares of marriage to his other duties, was, as he had known from the time of his father's death, utterly impracticable. Then, if being betrothed, they waited until his brothers were settled in the world, and his sisters wedded, by that time he would be almost an old man. He was old even now, while Hope was a mere child compared with him. Her love might change; she might feel her promise a burden; or, if not, what right had he to win that which he could not claim?

He had not won her heart yet; her open affection forbade that fear—or joy, for so it seemed alternately. If he were never to let her see the anguished passion of his own, she would go away, keeping always a tender

reverence for him; but still free to love. For he discerned that hers was the nature of many, nay, of most women, gentle and good; loving—not with that rare ideal devotion, pure as the tenderness of an angel, yet strong and self-sustaining as the passion of a man—but with the mild sweetness which is ever ready to answer love with love, so that the first who worthily woos is almost sure to win.

Thus, if he let her go, would Hope probably be won. The thought was to him such frightful agony, that for a moment he felt as if he could tear asunder all ties—all duties—snatch the child, and fly with her to some new world, where she should be to him instead of brothers, sisters, land, or home,—in the stead of everything but conscience.

That, at least, would never be stilled—never! He knew he should continually hear it, and shudder—ay, even on his wife's breast—as though it were a cry like that which haunted Cain: “Where are thy brethren?”

— Six souls that loved and trusted him,



balanced against one ! Perhaps, even had the sacrifice included not himself alone but Hope, it ought to be made. Now, when Hope did not yet love him—when, if he kept firm to his iron will of self-renunciation, she never might love him—Yes ! the right course must lie there.

*“When two paths of duty bewilder thee,
and thou knowest not which is right to
follow, choose that which to thyself is most
full of thorns.”*

This wise, stern saying, knelled itself all night into Ninian's soul. Towards morning he slept, and dreamt that he was in a little boat with Hope—she looking at him with sad, sweet face, pale as that he had lately seen, but more tender and love-lorn—seeming to say, mutely, that no sin towards kindred was greater than that of breaking a fond woman's heart. Then, he thought, the great waves of the Loch rose and rose, rolling over them both. He snatched his darling, covering her eyes and mouth with wild kisses—lover's kisses—such as he had never

dared to press there before. And then they sank down—down—to something that he knew was death—yet which was calm, and without fear. Until at last they wakened together in the heavenly mansions, where there is “neither marrying nor giving in marriage;” but all love becomes pure as that of the angels of God.

He woke. Weakened by his long struggle of body and mind, he turned his head on the pillow, and wept like a child.

And all the while, in the next chamber Hope lay sleeping in Tinie’s arms, or talking with her the pleasant nonsense that affectionate girls use—all unconscious of the strong heart writhing for her sake.

Jest and earnest—man’s mere sport and woman’s faith—woman’s folly and man’s despair—God knows how often such contrasts exist in the world!

CHAPTER XII.

Two or three more days passed in the cottage by the Gare-Loch. Happy days ! halcyon days, wherein morning brought night, and night waned into morning, and none wished the hours slower or faster. Ninian, somewhat ailing after that day—the whole story of which none but himself knew—was kept at home, under tender guardianship, “a giant bound with flowers,” Tinie said. She, being a good deal humbled and subdued by the affair of unfortunate Mr. MacCallum (in whose disappearance the boys greatly gloried), was on her best behaviour with everybody, even with the Professor. He, worthy man,

disported himself in her smiles like a porpoise in the sun, continually rising out of his native element—his deep sea of science—to look up at her with a sigh of gratification, which Edmund declared was a sound exactly like the “pech” of the porpoises in the Clyde. Whereupon Reuben used to inveigh warmly against such ridicule used towards so learned a man, whose only fault in the young cynic’s eyes was that he condescended to notice a stupid, childish thing like Tinie.

It was one morning at breakfast, that Ninian, in the quiet way with which he always “made up his mind,” observed, “Children, I must leave you, and go home to-morrow.”

“To-morrow!” There was a general cry of complaint; Tinie’s being the loudest, and Hope’s the most pathetic. Lindsay ventured to hint that if business were not very pressing he need not be uncomfortable about the deserted house. Miss Reay, lately vanishing to Edinburgh in considerable dudgeon, had consented to look after old Katie and The

Gowans. If Ninian could but stay—just a few days more.

“I cannot; it is impossible!”

“But you are not looking quite yourself. You would be better for a holiday.”

“No, no; don’t ask me. I cannot do it,” answered he, restlessly; and Ninian said no more. But many a time during the morning he found her quiet eyes fixed on his face. Once, when all the rest were down by the shore, she came to him as he sat writing.

“Ninian, suppose we all went home together? I can easily manage it, if you would rather have it so.”

“I? What made you think any such thing?”

“Because you looked so dull—so melancholy, when Tinie spoke of this being your last day with us at the Clyde.”

“Nonsense. I am anxious to go home. I have so much work before me. Besides, how do you know that I am not quite glad to get rid of you all?”

It was a mere jest, but it did not sound exactly like his jests of old. Lindsay looked grave, ceased to speak, and let him go on with his writing. They were business letters—a tolerable number. He finished them; threw them on one side with a weary air, and sat idle, his head upon his hand.

“Is there anything the matter with you, Ninian?”

“The matter! Nothing at all. I wish, sister, you would not fidget yourself and me. Indeed, it is unnecessary.” He spoke, not angrily, but still not as he used to speak. The minute afterwards he repented. “You see I am so idle here—I shall end by getting cross. I almost think I have been cross lately. Tinie positively accused me of it this morning.”

“Tinie is a thoughtless lassie—enough to vex anybody. If you did say a hasty word sometimes, she ought not to mind it.”

“Which implies that I do say it. Tell me plainly. You don’t think I am unkind to these children?” said he, with a look of great anxiety.

“Never! You could not be unkind. But I have thought now and then——”

“What! have you, too, found something to blame me with?” he sharply interrupted.

“Well, tell me, and I’ll try to alter anything in me that gives you offence.”

“Ninian!”

“Forgive me, I never ought to say one hard word to you. But you see, your brother is not quite such an angel as you all imagine. It is a hard world, and he has to fight hardly through it. Business now troubles me. The children need not know this, which is the——” the truth, he was about to say, but stopped. He knew it was *not* the truth.

“Yes, I understand; I have thought so more than once, and said so to Hope, when she fancied you were vexed with her.”

“Have I been harsh to her?”

“Nay—not harsh; but you have seemed to take less notice of her. And she is a sensitive little thing, with such a tender

heart, though no one would have imagined that, so frozen up as she appeared at first, so quiet as she is even now. I often fancy nobody knows that child but me, and I am sure none of you love her so well."

Ninian sat down, shading his eyes. After awhile he said, with a shadow of a smile, "You make me out to be something very cruel, Lindsay. Is the child really hurt? Does she think me unkind to her?"

"Not unkind—only somewhat cold. And she feels it the more, because you made such a pet of her when she was ill, and ever since then, until the last few days. I tell her she must not mind; you cannot always be thinking of a child like her, though I am sure you love her as much as ever you did."

Ninian started a little, and glanced at Lindsay. But Our Sister, the simplest of all women, who had seen nothing of life beyond her own circle, and had read no hearts save her own, whose brief story had ended long

ago, spoke with most unsuspicious, unconscious air. He saw that. Oh! with what thankfulness!

“ You were quite right there. I do love her as well, I think, as I love Tinie. You may tell her so, if she speaks to you again.”

“ And you will show it a little more—take just a little more notice of her,” pleaded the gentle Lindsay, who could not bear to see the least shadow creeping among those she loved. “ She is a foolish little creature to imagine such nonsense; but whenever you look grave, or speak to her differently than usual, she fancies you do not like her on account of her father.”

“ What must I do—what can I do ?” muttered Ninian, in despair. But there was that gaze which, from one or other of his loving ones, was ever upon him, at times driving him almost wild. He must meet it, and did so.

“ You know, Lindsay, that this is untrue, and altogether a mistake of Hope’s. You

must put the thought entirely out of her mind. Speak to her at once."

"Why should not you, brother? It would come so much better from you."

"I cannot—I cannot! I mean," added he, quickly, "that I am getting too old to deal with girls' fancies. I am quite a gruff, elderly man, you know. It is time to give up having pets among young people, if I use them so badly that even my sister takes their part against me."

Lindsay looked up in blank astonishment at his strange tone. "Is it true, then, Ninian? Are you really annoyed with poor little Hope, or with me? Then, indeed, I will not tease you any more."

With a smile, in which she tried to hide all pain, but could not, she gathered up her knitting and was leaving the room. But Ninian put his hand on her shoulder.

"Sister! I think it was I who teased you! I am indeed getting as cross as Tinie said. But you don't know, Lindsay—you don't know!"

He looked in her face—his elder sister—his mother's only daughter—she, from whose childish remembrance had come his sole knowledge of a tie lost at his birth—she, who had tried, even in her girlhood, to be grave, and tender, and motherly over him; who, as he grew up to manhood, had done a harder thing, gradually sinking the superiority of eldership—becoming *only* a sister—yielding to his stronger mind, and taking beside him silently the proper—the woman's place. But he felt at times, and did now, as if he should like to go back to the old days when he—still a boy—used to come and hide his face in his elder sister's lap, telling her all his troubles. There was a subdued, childlike pathos in his voice, as once more he said, “Oh! Lindsay, you don't know!”

She turned in great alarm; so much, that he knew he must unsay his words, change his look, and go back to the former ways.

“ You don't know,” he added, taking up the words, “ how tired out I was with this

year's anxiety. Besides, I have not felt quite well, I own.'

"Poor Ninian! I must take better care of you," said Lindsay, in a voice more like the fondness she used towards him when he was a boy than the quiet deference with which she always treated him now. "I wish you would let me go home with you to-morrow."

"What! and leave our young flock to guard themselves? We should have a second edition of the MacCallum affair, for certain."

Our Sister looked serious. "I had not thought of that. Oh, Ninian!" she said, with a sort of despairing sigh, "what a pity our young people will grow up! Whatever will we do with them all? There's Tinie—such a wild, gay creature!—and Hope, getting prettier every day, except that she is such a child still. And I don't think she will take to Tinie's thoughtless ways."

"Indeed!"

"No," continued Lindsay, waxing more

tender over her favourite as Ninian seemed to wax cold. “She has a warm heart; she will trifle with no one’s feelings. Heaven grant that no one may ever trifle with hers.”

“Amen!” said Ninian, beneath his breath. He felt strong to do as he had willed. He was one of those who can cut off a right arm, and pluck out a right eye, and so enter maimed into heaven.

It was a dull day, the last of Ninian’s stay, though he tried to enliven them all; and at last, seeing his levity disregarded, and his jokes melting heavily on the air, proposed a sail up the river—a sort of leave-taking of the Clyde.

“Not in the little boat,” cried Hope. “Oh! Mr. Græme, you will not put yourself into such danger again?”

He looked once, only once, at her anxious face, and said, “Still timid, Hope? You will never do for a Scottish lassie. But come, children all! we will take the steam-boat to Rothesay and back.”

They did so, except Lindsay and Edmund; calling for the Professor on their way—much to Tinie's objection, who said he was such a queer looking man, and either sat dumb or talked so loud and lengthily, that she was quite ashamed to be seen in public with him. Which feeling probably accounted for the fact that she went and hid herself behind “the man at the wheel,” until Kenneth Reay, looking for her in great terror, was induced to sit there and converse; when she listened, mockingly, yet still she listened, to a learned discourse on the peculiar currents of the Clyde, the supposed origin of the Kyles of Bute, or the geological formation of the Great and Lesser Cumbrays.

It was a still autumn afternoon, just dull enough to lay dark blue shadows on the hills that stood grand and cold around the Holy-Loch, and afterwards breaking into just sun enough to show the two pale ghost-like peaks of Arran lying on the horizon like a cloud.

Ninian stood by himself, watching the line of either shore, the views changing mo-

mently fairer at every change. He thought of his happy days here—happier than any since his boyhood—and of the little dark office in Edinburgh where he would be on the morrow. It would look darker than ever now. He began to wonder when he should have another holiday, and somehow, by a concatenation of ideas impossible to account for, he remembered an old tale which his grave father had used to tell, years ago, of the only real holiday *he* ever had in his youth. It was when he brought his bride—Ninian's mother—to spend their honeymoon by the Clyde. The son—he that now looked on the same hills and the same rivers—thought how his parents had looked on them once, with eyes shining joy into each other. He had heard his father and mother were a loving couple. But it would not do to dwell on these things. He turned and gazed down in the seething, foamy waves that danced in the wake of the engines, until he felt all dazzled.

“It will make your head-ache if you

look down at the waves in that way," said a voice gentle as ever, but a little more hesitating and shy than it had been a week ago. He had left Hope talking merrily with the twins, and it quite startled him to see her at his side. He tried, but could not move away from that frank smile, that voice of innocent tenderness. He thought, as he did sometimes, in the horribly conflicting moods of his mind, that perhaps his stern conscientiousness was only egregious vanity, and that there was no need to be so guarded with the child.

So he let her lean beside him and talk, even laying his hand on her shoulder, in his old habit. She was such a little thing standing by his side.

"Well, Hope, when you grow older, and see all sorts of beautiful places, perhaps even go to America——"

"You will speak of my going to America; you have done so once or twice lately. Indeed, I don't want——" She stopped abruptly, possibly with the silent pain that she

always seemed to feel on alluding to her father. Ninian's heart yearned over her, but it, too, was dumb. Hope said at last, "And when I do see all these places, what then?"

"You must remember your first acquaintance with my beautiful Clyde; it is my own river, for I was born, and my mother died, there." And he pointed to the town of Dunoon, with its curved bay, its Castle-hill, and the wooded hills rising above the pretty town, now growing dim behind them.

"Yes, I know. Lindsay told me as we passed," said Hope, her sweet face saddening, so easily touched is youth. She drew closer to Ninian, as if, despite the long interval of years, he still needed sympathy—women do so love to play the comforter. But he did not speak, and his countenance was blank and hard, even though he was looking across the river to his own birth-place,—his mother's grave. Perhaps he was thinking—we all have such thoughts at

times—that it was a pity he had ever come into the weary world at all.

Hope, standing beside him, sighed.

“What do you sigh for, little one?” said he, with a faint mockery of his old familiar tone. “Am I too grave for you? Had you not better run back to the children?”

“No; unless you had rather I went away. Is it so?”

For his life he could not have withstood the pained, beseeching voice. “Come, my child, we may never have another sail down the Clyde. Stay here, and we will look out together.”

So, drawing her arm in his, they stood for a long time.

“Mr. Græme,” Hope began at last. She had always addressed him thus, of course not saying “Brother,” as the rest did, and never dreaming of the presumption of calling him “Ninian.”

“Well, Hope, I hear. Your wee face seems burdened with some secret. If so, out with it.”

“I am afraid.” She hesitated, and her colour came and went so fast that Ninian felt a painful fear.

“Any more of Tinie’s wild doings?” asked he, uttering something near, but not exactly his thought. “Another MacCallum, I suppose?—they seem to grow on every hedge. Has Tinie been putting her nonsense into your head too?”

“Oh, no! Do not be angry! Tinie does, indeed, tell me everything; but I always tell her, too, where I think she is wrong. I could not help that affair of Mr. MacCallum, but bitterly it grieved me. I would not have done such a thing for the whole world!”

No, she would not. Her eyes, the mirror of her heart, spoke that. There was in her little of firmness, less of passion, but in all she felt she was sincere. Ninian’s old terror awoke. Agonised lest, in years to come, he might do her wrong, he almost wished that instead of her own sweet, simple, loving self, she had been more like Tinie.

He answered her in a grave, guardian-

like tone. "I hope, my dear child, that whenever your time for these things comes, you will treat me as you should treat your father, were he with you, and tell me all your mind."

"Of course I should. It would be but right, you know." She blushed a little, but looked up straight in his face. Hitherto at least, she had evidently nothing to hide. He ought to have been satisfied and glad. But was he? Oh! strange contradiction of human nature! At the very knowledge in which his conscience rejoiced, his weak heart recoiled in pain. He did not speak again for many minutes.

"Mr. Græme," once more began Hope, trembling beneath her desperate perseverance, "still I have not said what I wanted to say to you."

"Say on, then."

"I—I have been thinking of myself a great deal lately."

"That is something new," he answered, with much tenderness. The truth of his speech

was proved by the fact that she never even noticed it.

“And the result is, I want to do as my father said—I want to be a governess.” This declaration, which had apparently been weighing down her poor little heart for some minutes, came out at last, and left her perfectly frightened at her own daring.

Ninian, whatever warfare he felt within him, resorted as ever to his only support, ambush, and shield—silence.

“Are you angry with me?—have I said anything wrong?—or”—the innocent trouble would find its way at last—“do you care for me less than you used to do?”

“My dear,” said Ninian, with sad, grave voice, “Lindsay told me all you have fancied lately, and I told her to assure you it was not true. I care for you as much as ever I did.”

The child, smiling content, read that truth on his face; angels in heaven might have read, weeping for pity, the deeper truth branded upon his writhing heart.

“Was it that fancy, then, which made you speak about being a governess? or must I ask, as I did once before, are you getting tired of us?”

“Then you remember that night?—how kind! But as I said then I say now. I could never be tired of you. I wish I were indeed one of the “Miss Græmes,” as people so often suppose I am; then I should live always at The Gowans, and never leave you. ‘No,’ she added, suddenly recollecting herself, “though I were your sister, it would make no difference; if I thought as I think now, I should leave you still.”

“Yes, I suppose so,” said Ninian, bitterly. Hope was first surprised, then looked ready to cry; but there was evidently something in her mind that kept up her courage, in the only way by which such yielding creatures ever have courage—some purpose that draws its root not from the will but the heart. What that purpose was, she seemed far too timid to show.

“Well, child,” continued Ninian, “do you

want my advice concerning your scheme ? I thought you already knew what I thought on that subject, at least as regards my own sisters. I would rather die than let Tinie or the twins quit their brother's roof to turn governesses."

" I know that ; but I am not your sister."

" That is true ; I have no right over you, at least, no right but of advising, and that only while you are pleased to allow the same."

Poor Ninian ! Strange that the best men in the world, when racked by great mental conflict, wound those they most cherish and never even know it.

Hope made one desperate effort more. " If you are angry with me, if I should do this against your will, I will say nothing about it ; but go back to The Gowans."

" You did not wish to go back to The Gowans, then, child ! Is there any mystery that I am not to know ?" cried he ; and his wild jealous fancy lighting on every probability, remembered what a noble, manly fellow Edmund was growing, and how,

since they came to Clyde-side, he had ceased to neglect Hope, and even openly praised her beauty. Was there any new vexation rising up in that quarter? Hope's answer decided the point.

"There is no mystery at all; even Tinie does not know this feeling in my mind, though it was talking to her that first awakened it. You know she tells me everything; she told me—please forgive her and me too, if it was wrong—but she told me all your conversation together the day she walked with you towards Helensburgh. Oh, Mr. Græme, why do you look so? Are you quite sure you are not angry?"

"Angry? Foolish little thing! Nay, go on."

"I thought—but I am ashamed to tell you my idle thoughts."

"You must!" And he looked her full in the face, bracing his strength to anything that might come. "My sisters keep back nothing from me. You would not have less trust in me, or think worse of me, than they?"

"I! If you only knew what I do think of you, but I can't tell it—I never can," answered Hope, in a broken voice. "What I mean is this—though I know I shall never say it as I ought—that here have I been living in your house a year; these"—she hesitated, blushing scarlet—"these very clothes I wear are your giving—you that work so hard, and have so many brothers and sisters, while I—oh! cannot you understand me now?"

"Yes, I do, my child, my dear Hope!" he answered, with inexpressible tenderness. Something more than love was awaking in him towards his darling. He began to reverence her, as a man should ever reverence the woman in whom he sees his future wife.

His wife. The thought sprang up in his heart like a light; the next moment he had trodden it out to ashes.

"So," he continued, determined to speak thus, that no coming time might leave any doubt, "my little Hope knows all about me; that I will have to work hard all my life, at



least the greater part of it, and that my boys and girls need never hope to run wild without their stern old bachelor brother to look after them?"

"I know!" said Hope, accustomed to his way of putting gravest things in jesting fashion, and looking at him with eyes that spoke her full heart.

"But if I do this cheerfully, willingly—feeling that giving some things I receive others—tenderness, honour, home-happiness—if my sisters are content, and do not wish to run away from me, not even to get married, as Miss Reay kindly proposed—why should not my little Hope do as they?"

"Because I am not your sister, and because (if this is wrong for me to say, I am very sorry) I am afraid that those who might care for me do not, and will never send for me home again. So, what I shall have to do some day, I may as well do at once, and try to be a governess."

"God forbid!" said Ninian earnestly; and then he began to reason with her, treating

her like a woman and an equal, showing her all the hardships and hindrances of her scheme. But still she kept firm, firmer than he had ever known her. She never contradicted, not one word, yet he saw she was not moved a jot. Her thorough woman's nature—woman-like even to its weakness—had only two points of firmness, saving strongholds when all the rest yielded—a clear right-mindedness, an unerring affection. These sustained her now.

Ninian tried her in every way;—at last, with an argument that while wielding made his own heart to quiver—

“There is one thing more besides the world's cares—its dangers. You are very young, and—I may as well speak the plain truth, for I dare say you know it already—very beautiful.”

She smiled, innocently, yet proud. “I am glad you think so, as Tinie and Lindsay do. I was pleased when they first told me of it. I myself always love people ten times more when I fancy them beautiful.”



There came a strange convulsion over the face, so "hard-featured" as it was! "Well then!" continued Ninian, "being beautiful, other people will perhaps love you the more, or at least admire you. This admiration might harm you, wrong you, insult you." And he seemed to take a stern pleasure in using the words, until he saw she did not understand them in the least.

"I do not see that. If women admired me, I should get more kindly treated; if any gentleman told me I was handsome, and that he loved me for it, of course—supposing he were good—I should marry him, and be very happy."

Truly the heart, crushed and frozen down through childhood and early girlhood, was now the most utter piece of unworldliness it was possible to conceive. Ninian shuddered at the bare thought of admitting even the glare of daylight upon its unstained snow.

"I tell you, you must give up this notion. You are a child, knowing nothing. My little

Hope—my innocent one—I would rather cut off this right hand than that it should let you go."

He spoke in passion smothered but strong, holding her so tight that her little fingers struggled as if in pain.

"Did I hurt you, my darling—my poor wee birdie!" said he, in an accent of wild fondness. And then his true soul came into him again. "I am rather rough in my manner, Hope, but you must attribute it all to my strong interest in you, and my sense of the responsibility your father left with me. Until he claims you—and he may do so ere long—I trust so, if it would relieve your mind to quit us and go to him——"

"Oh, no! don't speak of that! I mean—nay, I don't clearly know what I mean, except that I love you all so much. I would never have dreamed of parting from you, except that I thought it right."

("My true one!" throbbed the upright heart, against which she must not, could not be suffered to rest—but its voice was silent.)

"I know," Ninian said, "you would do everything you thought right; but in this case you must let me judge. You must go back, for a time at least, until your father receives you—or till"—there was one jarring tone, and his voice went cheerfully on as before—"till that 'gentleman' unknown, whom we alluded to, shall make his appearance."

She smiled—shook her head—saying, in girlish fashion, "She could wait—indeed, she rather hoped never to marry at all."

"Well, until you change your mind, be content to think yourself one of my sisters, whom it would grieve me inexpressibly to lose."

"Would it? oh, would it? I don't deserve that you should be so kind to me—such a man as you—so good, so—— Oh, if it would not make Tinie jealous, I think even she herself could not love her brother more than I!"

"Oh, God!" he gasped, turning his head away, so that she neither saw nor heard,



“how will all this end! But,” whispered his strong heart, leaping up in stern joy, “*One* only feels—*one* only suffers! It is well—ay, it is very well!”

CHAPTER XIII.

NINIAN went home. With his usual independent will, he rose early, and was off in the grey morning, saying good-by to nobody except to Lindsay, who had heard him stirring, and came to his door.

“Will you not let me go with you?” was her last entreaty, as she looked up to his eyes, heavy with unrest. “You are still not well?”

“Not quite. Never mind—I must cure myself all alone. But,” he added, turning back with his foot on the threshold, “it is really nothing. Don’t tell the children.”

So he went away from the sunny Gare-Loch—sunny now no more, but wrapped in

a dusky mist. River and mountains faded from his sight—his holiday was over.

A man who can give up dreaming and go to his daily realities—who can smother down his heart, its love or woe, and take to the hard work of his hand—who defies fate—and if he must die, dies fighting to the last—that man is life's best hero.

I dare say it would be more interesting and poetical if I were to paint Ninian Græme leaning over the boat's side, and dropping womanly tears into the Clyde, and lying back in the railway-carriage spent by the exhaustion of emotion. But he did not. Whatever he felt, Heaven knoweth! and Heaven is merciful, tender, and dumb! The only words he said—and he might have soliloquised a whole page—for he had the carriage to himself—were, “I must go home and work.”

Work—work—work! It is the iron ploughshare that goes over the field of the heart, rooting up all the pretty grasses, and

the beautiful, hurtful weeds that we have taken such pleasure in growing, laying them all under, fair and foul together—making plain, dull-looking arable land for our neighbours to peer at; until at night-time, down in the deep furrows the angels come and sow.

Ninian did not go to The Gowans. He might have felt a repugnance to Miss Reay, now temporary regent there by Lindsay's wish. "It will help her out until the Professor takes his new house; and she is a thrifty, kindly body, though she has such a tongue," remarked Our Sister, who had a good word for everybody. So Miss Reay was put in charge of The Gowans. Possibly Mr. Græme objected to be included in that consignment, or, knowing how hard he must work, he would not suffer himself to dream in that lonely house—in the parlour where he and the child had sat night after night during Lindsay's illness—in the study whither he had carried her, and where, for all he knew,

the flowers he had put beside her every morning, even the last morning, might be mouldering on their dead stalks yet. He might have thought of these things, or he might not ; but he certainly drove at once to his office, ensconced himself there, and finally began to think—as he found a letter from his friend, Mrs. Forsyth—whether he could not contrive to go down every night to sleep at Musselburgh, until his household absentees came home.

Innumerable slight necessities had gathered round him, showing that Ninian Græme could not be missed from his place for three weeks without somebody wanting him and feeling his loss. His brow was less heavy, the hard lines about his mouth softened, as he applied himself to these small needs and kindly charities that clustered in his way. Finishing them, he thought, half smiling, half sorrowful, of a line in his favourite author—usually a favourite with common-sense people, as being at once the

truest, greatest, and most common-sense poet in the world:

“Heaven does with us as we with torches do,
Not light them for themselves.”

He wondered, with one of his quaint conceits, whether a certain torch he knew would crackle or writhe in the burning, and how long it would be before it was quite burnt out. It was a long time since he had been at Musselburgh—not since the fever had come into his household—except the night when he had taken Rachel home. He thought of her, and of what had become of her; half reproaching himself for having thus thought for the first time. But he had been so dead to everything in the world outside while dwelling in that sweet, still Eden on the shores of Clyde. Coming out of it, all things and all people looked like shadows seen a long time ago, and half forgotten since. He almost marvelled to find the old town of Musselburgh standing where it did, with its dull, slow river, and Prince Charlie’s bridge,

over which he had walked with Mr. Ulverston a year before. Thinking of Mr. Ulverston took him back to that sweet evening at Ardmore, after which the young Englishman had disappeared from Clyde-side. Nian had been sorry at the time, but did not much mind that now. It seemed as if all acquaintanceships, ay, and dearer ties, were growing pale and distant. Until he stood at Mrs. Forsyth's gate, he did not even think of his old friend John.

“ Mr. Græme, is that you? I am so glad to see you,” was the widow's hearty welcome, as she came running out from the inferior regions of her dwelling, with a small iron in one hand, and in the other a pair of minister's bands. She showed them to Nian with a motherly pride. “ I'm busy, you see; my John is quite better, and going to try to preach next Sunday. I was feared that I would never see him in the pulpit again; but God is good, and has let the poor widow keep her ae bairn.”

The tears were in her eyes. She spoke

with unconscious pathos, using the accent of her homely youth, though in general she prided herself on her superior breeding, as becoming the mother of a minister.

Ninian shook her hand warmly, to the imminent risk of the snowy cambric of which she seemed so proud. “Is John here, then? It will be such a pleasure to see him again. You did not tell me he was come?”

“I did not know. I left him at his manse last week, and he followed me yesterday. He could not do without his mother, and he wanted to preach here. He said his first sermon after this long illness should be in the kirk where he preached that afternoon —do you mind? when your sisters were all there, and I and—that daft hizzie?”

“Hush!” said Ninian, wishing to stop the mother’s bitter speech, as just then John Forsyth was seen walking up the garden.

There are some faces to whom hard lines come naturally—faces born to grow sharp and dark; but his, so fair, so mild, so deli-

cate ! it was a pitiful thing to see it ploughed into unnatural harshness. Apostle-like he still looked, but the softness of St. John was changing into the stoniness of St. Peter. His eyes had a fierce light—the enthusiasm that might in time become fanaticism ; his gesture as he walked was abrupt, irregular. At sight of Ninian he started, and seemed inclined to turn back, but recovered himself, and met his old friend. They shook hands silently.

“Are we interrupting you, John ?” said the anxious mother, seeing he looked discomposed, and his answers to Ninian were brief and cold. “You see, Mr. Græme, he is busy learning his sermon off by heart—it is a very hard task upon him.”

“Yes,” said Ninian, anxious to pass into some conversation which might distract the painful emotion which he saw was changing his friend’s countenance from pale to ashen, though not a muscle quivered—“it is very hard upon our Scottish ministers—the prejudice that congregations have against a read

sermon. It seems to me mere folly. What difference can there be between a sermon written and read, and another written and preached from memory? If I were a minister, I would brave public opinion at once, rather than give myself such needless trouble."

"Trouble!" said John Forsyth, his wild eye flashing. "Trouble! when it is for God's service, and done to win souls! Ay, there it is; we care not what we do to gain the things of this world, but when Heaven asks aught from us, we call it *trouble*. You err, Ninian—you greatly err."

There was a quick, stern dogmatism about him, quite new in the gentle John Forsyth. He seemed ready to dash out his opinions like firebrands, little caring where they alit. If such incendiaries get among God's harvest, they burn up wheat and tares together.

"Eh, but I am sure this is trouble enough to you, John," interposed the mother. "You that are telling me every day how poor your

memory is of late, and how you cannot keep your mind to your book-learning. It's no easy, your minister's work, nor will be."

"I do not want it easy. It shall be hard—the harder the better. I will not offer that which costs me nothing."

"If we give willingly and in love, we never think of the cost, be it great or small," Ninian ventured to say. "I am sure no minister ever devoted himself to Heaven more earnestly than John Forsyth."

"Ay, I did—I did! I used, when I was a child, to feel like a little Samuel—a Timothy! and when I grew a youth, I would have been a Renwick—an Alexander Peden. But it is not too late—I hope in God it is not too late!"

"How could it be too late, John, when you are so young—when you have talent enough to become one of the most popular among our ministers?"

"Popular!" he sternly repeated. "That would be only another form of self. I should but serve the devil a second time."

This was the only allusion he had yet made to the conflict he had passed through, or the passion which had consumed him. Out of the fire he came—safe, indeed, but scarred and seared into a likeness so changed from his old self that it might have been another man's. Ninian looked at him with other eyes and tenderer than heretofore. Alas! he understood these things now. Different, but yet alike, had been their year's history. He could have wrung John Forsyth's hand, and called him brother.

“So you are going to preach in the old kirk where you preached before?”

“Yes; it is my will. Perhaps the new vows I make regarding my future may be accepted there.” And something in his look convinced Ninian of the one grand aim of the young minister's life now—self-abasement, penance for having been led astray.

“What are those vows, if you will tell me?” said Ninian. “You know well, John, that no one can be more anxious over your happiness than I.”

“Happiness!” he repeated. It was a dangerous, torturing word to say to him as yet. Ninian repented of it.

“Your future, then, whatever it may prove. I hope it may be full of honour and peace.”

“Do not talk of either ; talk of duty. That is what I live for. The hardest, the fiercest, the most humbling, is the better fitted for me. Therefore I have resigned my church in the North. It is too quiet—the people are too virtuous—more so than their minister,” he added, bitterly.

“John—John!” sighed his mother. She made no other murmur. His will seemed everything now.

“I will go through Scotland as a field-preacher. I would go abroad at once as a missionary, but that would be a life too easy—too much after my own longing when I was a boy. The things I most recoil from, those I must do. I am going up and down in cities and towns, among lanes and alleys, amidst all the vice and foulness I loathed so

when we were boys, Ninian. If I preach anywhere, I will preach there."

"John, my puir bairn! ye will kill yourself!" sobbed the mother. He looked at her with a sort of compassion, as if he did not belong to her; but gradually his heart melted,—it had been so gentle once towards her and every living thing.

"No; I will not kill myself, mother, if only for your sake."

"He said he couldn't do without me, you know," was the poor woman's confirmatory appeal to Ninian, as she came and stood by her son. He let her take his hand and smooth his coat-sleeve, in the caressing way that mothers love; but he stood quite passive. Ninian's eye passed from him to the papers he held—his lately-written sermon. Its text was—*"He that loveth father or mother, or wife, or sister, or brethren, more than me, is not worthy of me."*

And truly in the young minister's face—pale, rigid, yet lighted with the fire of religious devotion—Ninian read the sign of

one who *was* worthy. God's service requires such—martyrs as well as apostles; and the “noble army” on earth makes the “goodly company of the prophets” in heaven. It is not hard!

John Forsyth sat down once more to study his sermon; while his mother and Ninian kept aloof, speaking in an under tone. They had talked long, and Mr. Græme had not yet ventured to put the question—a sore one, but which he was most anxious to have answered—concerning Rachel, when Mrs. Forsyth's handmaiden interrupted them, saying that a person without was asking for Mr. Græme.

“ Some one of my clerks, probably. They might let me alone, when I have come all the way from the Gare-Loch since morning. Ask his message, will you, Jean ?”

“ It's no a man, sir,” whispered the old servant, confidentially. “ Gin I maun tell, it's a puir auld bodie that comed ance or mair after Mrs. Armstrong.”

Whether the fault lay in Jean's tongue,

or her mistress's suspicious ears, certain it was that Mrs. Forsyth caught the word. "What is that you say about—" She glanced at her son, and paused. "I tell you," said she, speaking in a quick under voice to Ninian, "if it is a message from *her*, you can do as you will, but I will never see her face more. She went away to her own folk at the Border, and ne'er a word have I heard of her sinsyne, nor care to hear. Blude's thicker than water, and I bear her nae ill-will; but I couldna see her, Mr. Græme—I couldna do it."

"You need not be frightened, ma'am," said an English voice, as Jane Sedley walked right into the room, with a marvellous dignity in her little crooked figure. "My mistress wouldn't see you, not upon any account. She told me to say so. It's Mr. Græme she wants, and nobody else."

"Then she may go to Mr. Græme's ain door, for she shall ne'er darken mine," cried Mrs. Forsyth, forgetting everything but her indignation.

“Nay, my good friend, do not vex yourself,” said Ninian. “Mrs. Sedley, shall I go and see your mistress at once, or can she wait until to-morrow?”

“She cannot wait—oh, sir, she cannot wait,” answered the woman, in a voice that warned Ninian of some impending trouble. “She has been seeking for you since morning, and now it is quite night.”

“Where is she?”

“In the garden. She would not enter the house.”

“No, nor would I let her if she dared.”

“Mother!” said John Forsyth. He had not stirred from his table at the far corner of the room. All their speech had been carried on in hasty whispers. They thought he had not heard, but he had. Ninian was sure of it the moment he saw the young man’s face.

“Mother!”

“Yes, my son.”

“Let our cousin Rachel in!” Every word fell sharp, cold, and clear.

“ But, my son—my dear John.”

He repeated it again, only altering one word. “ *Fetch* our cousin Rachel in.”

Then he rose, made a show of collecting books to study, but went, leaving the lamp behind. With a slow, firm step, and eyes that never moved but looked rigidly forward, he quitted the room. They heard him walk upstairs and bolt his door. Then all was silence.

Her son gone, Mrs. Forsyth’s wrath burst out. “ I wonder she daur show her face here, the heartless quean; she that wasna worth ae blink o’ my John’s sweet een. I’se warrant she repents her. But she’ll no get him noo—she’ll no get him noo !”

Her broad, shrill accents—broader and shriller the more angry she grew—were wasted on thin air. Ninian had left the room and followed Jane Sedley.

“ There she is, sir, standing in the garden walk ; speak gently, for she’s not quite herself, I think.”

“ I am so glad to see you again, Rachel,”

said Ninian. But she did not come to meet him, or stir in any way. In the darkness, her face was indistinguishable, but her figure was seen, still and upright, like an effigy of stone. "I wish I had known you were seeking me. Do you want to speak to me about anything?"

"Yes."

"Will you come in with me, then?"

"No!"

("Ah, lack! sir," whispered Jane, "those two words, 'Yes' and 'No,' are the only words I've been able to get out of her these four-and-twenty hours. But she'll hear if I say more. Speak to her again, please.")

"Rachel, you need have no reluctance to enter; you will see no one but me. It will never do to stay here, this dark, rainy night. Come in, then—indeed you must."

He took one of her hands—they were locked together, close and cold—but she made no resistance, and he led her into the house.

"Where must I bring her?" said he, as,

leaving Rachel without the parlour door he approached Mrs. Forsyth, who sat by her fireside, guarding its sanctity, the image of rigid propriety and bitter reproach.

“Bring her in here! You do not want to turn me from my own hearth, do you?”

Ninian brought the poor soul past the threshold, and set her in a chair. Truly “he brought” and “he set,” for she seemed to do nothing of her own will or power, but just as she was ruled by another. As she sat there, her clothes dripping with rain, neither moving limb nor feature, Ninian saw that a great blow had fallen upon her.

“Well, young woman,” began Mrs. Forsyth, but without looking towards her, “what do ye come for? My son is quite well now. I was little feared he would break his heart for you. Ye need not come speering after him, Rachel Armstrong, or whatsoever your name may be, for folk were saying strange things o’ ye after ye chose to flit frae your cousin’s house. But I suppose ye kenned naething o’ thae tales—naething ava?”

“Nay, now, Mrs. Forsyth,” said Ninian, trying to silence her.

“I’ll say my say, Mr. Græme. She’s my ain kith and kin, and I forgie her, as the Gospel bids us. But my mind misgives me the lassie’s gaun a’ wrang, and I’ll no see the like o’ that without a word o’ advice. Why could she no come here i’ the daylight, like a decent body, instead of daundering in at unseemly hours, looking as if she were gane wud, or something, maybe, that’s waur? Wha kens a’ the truth? Lassies dinna often go daft and say they’re married.”

“I entreat you—nay, you *must* be silent,” said Ninian’s resolute voice; and he looked anxiously at Rachel. Her eyes were fixed on the angry woman, but the expression of her face never once varied.

“Rachel, what can I do for you? Do you hear me?”

“Yes.”

Then she had heard Mrs. Forsyth likewise, and heard unmoved, unanswering. What strange change had frozen her thus?

“Mrs. Forsyth, indeed you must leave us. Rachel wishes to consult me, and you cannot expect her to do it before you, and after such upbraidings. Besides, you have forgotten your son.”

Ninian was a man of judgment ; he knew how to touch the light chords which guide humanity. After a few moments, Mrs. Forsyth left the room, and was heard knocking timidly at her son’s door.

Ninian closed and fastened that of the parlour : he had a strong presentiment of the tale to be listened to—the crisis of poor Rachel’s woe.

“Now, tell me,” said he, in his soft, kind voice,—“tell me what has happened. What is it you wish to say to me ?”

She looked round to assure herself that they were alone, then gave him slowly, and with a mechanical, business-like air, a paper, which he now saw she had held crushed in her left hand the whole time.

“I received this yesterday.”

Mr. Græme unfolded it quickly. It was a

blank envelope, containing several Bank of England notes. His heart misgave him ; but still he asked, as indifferently as he could, “ Did she know from whom it came ?”

“ *He* sent it.”

“ Mr. Sabine, your——” Ninian paused upon the words “ your husband,” for he saw that at the very mention of the name of Sabine the life had come again into that poor frozen face. He had gone aside to examine the notes by the light of the lamp ; Rachel got up and crossed the room to him, guiding herself by tables and chairs, her whole frame, once so rigid, quivering and swaying like one who rises from a dying bed and tries to walk.

“ Do you see that ?” she said, slowly, pointing with her finger to the envelope, which he had thrown aside.

It was in a hand somewhat round and forced, as if the writer wished to disguise it. The address was to *Miss Rachel Armstrong*.

Ninian looked—looked again ; he would

have turned his eyes anywhere rather than meet hers.

“What does my husband mean?”

“I cannot tell; I must have time to think. Are you quite sure this writing is his?”

“I—not to know his writing! It is different, certainly; he—he intends it for a jest—I think so! Do not you?” said she, uttering the words painfully, with quick, short breath.

Ninian made no answer.

“You see, it must be a jest, or he would not write my name ‘*Rachel Armstrong*.’” It seemed that all her will and mental power were expended in arranging these few consecutive words. Having uttered them, she stood, her eyes fixed on Ninian; as if his next sentence—his next look—contained her doom.

But he remained quite silent, turning the papers over and over, in close examination. At last Rachel touched him on the arm.

“I cannot—I cannot,” said he, huskily. “I

mean I cannot give you an answer just yet. Sit down, my poor girl, and tell me more. Did this man—”

With something of the old wrathful pride lighting her eyes, she corrected him—“ *My husband.*”

“ Did he answer your letter? Have you had any sight or tidings of him until now?”

Her whole frame seemed to collapse with some nameless fear, as she faintly uttered “ No!”

Ninian felt that the crisis was come, when he, and he alone, must unfold to this wronged woman the extent of her wrong. What that was, he was himself at present uncertain. One of two things must be the truth. Either the marriage was false, or he—the husband—wished her to believe it so. In any case he had deserted her.

“ Rachel,” said Ninian, trying to prepare her in some way, “ this is a bitter trial for you. How can I help you?”

“ Tell me, for I cannot quite understand, what it is my husband means?”

“ Nay, but what think you ?”

“ I cannot tell, my head is all strange. Perhaps on account of my disobeying him he is very angry. Still, I will have patience : I will follow him to the world’s end, but he shall forgive me. He ought, for am I not his wife ?”

“ Show me,” said Ninian, in as indifferent a manner as he could assume—“ show me the marriage-acknowledgment you told me of.”

“ I have it not. Why do you weary me about it ? I am not thinking of that now,” she answered.

“ You have it not ! Where is it then ? Tell me ; I must know.”

“ My husband has it.”

Ninian looked aghast. Even Rachel, unsuspicuous as she was, saw something in his countenance that terrified her. He had the presence of mind to conceal his doubts, only saying, “ Did you give the paper to him, or did he take it ?”

“ I gave it. I had no safe place to keep

it in, and in whose possession ought it to be but in my husband's?"

"That is true, if he were an honourable man."

"If? You do not doubt that—you could not—you dared not! He may be angry with me, scorn, despise me, alas! no wonder; yet you see the thought has almost crushed me. He may even in his anger forsake me for a time, but if he were to deceive me in the lightest thing—mind, I say only in the lightest thing—it would drive me mad!"

"Keep calm, Rachel," said Ninian, gently; but she went on unheeding.

"For years I have believed in him, wholly, worshippingly; almost as I believed in God. If I could do so no more, I should believe in nothing either in earth or heaven; I should sink down—down—until devils clutched me and made me—oh, there is nothing so vile that I could not be made, if I once lost faith in him!"

As she spoke her whole likeness changed—from weakness to strength, from paleness

to the glow of fierce emotion ; dazzling almost as youthful beauty. She looked her old self again, or even more glorious.

“ It is false ! ” she said, walking the room stately and fair. “ He may not be all perfect ; I think ”— and her voice faltered a little— “ I think in some things he has not used me well ; but, that he should stoop to be that which you, by your cruel ‘ if,’ implied, is utterly false—utterly impossible.”

It was a piteous thing, and so Ninian thought it, to see that while she divined the fearful suspicions which as yet had not passed his lips, they seemed to awake in her no terror of the consequences to herself. She only felt the dread of doubting her husband, the agony of his being degraded in her eyes.

Mr. Græme knew not what to do. To tell the deceived girl what he himself believed to be the truth that the marriage, if ever legal, was now rendered questionable by the fact that its sole proof was in the hands of the husband, who had, doubtless, destroyed it—

seemed wasting idle words upon air. *She* would never believe that he was thus guilty. To hint at such a thing would only enrage her beyond all bounds. And after all, the man whom she loved thus passionately might not, could not, be such a villain. Ninian determined to run the chance, and until further evidence to pre-suppose Geoffrey Sabinè all that Rachel believed.

“ You must not be angry with me,” he said, deprecatingly. “ We learn to distrust every one, we men of law. And you must remember I never knew anything of your husband.”

“ Oh, that you had ! But you will, for I must find him out, and you must help me. If he wishes to renounce me he shall ; it is his will, and I submit ; but he must forgive me—see me once more—let me cling to his breast, and bid him farewell. If I could only die, then and there, with his arms clasping me, and his face leaning over me ! He never knew, he never can know, how wildly I loved him—year by year—as a child, as a

girl, as a woman, till at last I loved him as a wife. Ay, I am his wife ! unworthy indeed, but still his wife !”

These words struggled out amid bitter moans, as, subdued in complete humility, she sat by the hearth, and gave way to a flood of tenderness and woe. Ninian marvelled to trace in her mien so much of feminine softness. It was for the last time. He never saw *the woman* in her again.

“ There now,” she said at last, drying her hot cheeks, and putting back her hair—“ I am quite composed ; it has done me good to weep, but I shall not weep again. I will bear my fate calmly, whatever it may be. Only I must once more see my husband. Advise me how I shall best find him !”

“ Have you thought,” answered Ninian, but gently, lest he might be venturing too far—“ Have you thought that possibly he wishes to avoid you ? It seems like it.”

Her face grew crimson, until the blush—alas ! it was her last blush—passed away like her last tear. “ I know it does,” she replied,

mournfully, "but that makes no difference; it might if I were only his betrothed, for I have some pride. His wife has another duty. If he is angry with me I must humble myself before him; if he is ashamed to own me I must tell him that I will hide myself from him, and trouble him no more. Any way, I must see him."

"How can he be traced? Can you give me any clue? Did he ever speak of his parents, or friends?" asked Mr. Græme, taking the straightforward view of the matter.

"No, no," answered she, restlessly. "I fancied they were either dead or estranged from him. But I never asked—they were nothing to me. I only thought of him. Besides, even if my husband had told me anything of his history or affairs, what right have I to tell you?"

"None—except that otherwise all search is in vain—for I have not the slightest information concerning him. Unless you trust me, it is utterly impossible for me to aid you in any way."

“Oh, that is hard—very hard ! Well, I will try to remember—that is, if I can do it without disobeying him—for the little he ever told me, he charged me to hold secret as death. Ay, and so I shall, except in this bitter emergency. Let me think.”

She sat silent a minute, and then said: “He told me one day, that though he was poor then he might not be so always, for he was heir to his father’s brother—an English baronet—who had a large estate. I laughed and called him ‘Sir Geoffrey,’—then almost wept, thinking how far I was beneath him —so he spoke no more of it, either then or at any other time.”

“His father’s brother,” mused Ninian—“then the name would be the same—Sabine; but we could easily find out, if we had a list of English baronetcies. I have one at my office, I think; I will look to-morrow.”

“To-morrow—I cannot wait ! You forget how different your to-morrows are from mine ! Could we go to-night ? It is not

late. I have strength for anything. Ah, be kind to me—let us go."

He had a pitying heart had Ninian Græme. Without a word, he prepared to start for Edinburgh. He unlocked the door, and called Mrs. Sedley. Her little figure arose from the foot of the stairs, where she had crouched, keeping watch for her beloved mistress.

Rachel was putting up her hair and tying on her bonnet, her hands shaking with excitement. "Don't hinder me, Jane. I am going to find him. I think I shall find him now. Are you ready, Mr. Græme?"

"Yes—but you are forgetting these." He pointed to the bank-notes, left strewn about the table.

Rachel's lips trembled. "I do not quite understand why he sent me money. He knew I had enough for my small needs. He is poor himself too, or was once."

"Still, you had better take charge of it."

Rachel held out her hand, but immediately drew back with a look of bitter pain. "No,

no; I can't touch it! I wanted a line—only one line of tenderness, forgiveness, and he has sent me—money!" She said no more, but pulled her veil down and walked steadily from the house.

Ninian gave the notes into Jane Sedley's care. He felt that there was faithfulness in the woman. Without speaking, they both followed Rachel towards Edinburgh.

It was too late for any but a foot journey. Rachel walked on and on, mile after mile, never lingering—never pausing. She did not once speak or look towards Ninian. He offered her his assistance; but she refused, and kept on, step after step, with a sort of mechanical energy.

"Ah, sir—never mind me—look to her," cried the little old woman, whom he turned to help. "My poor mistress—this is the way she has been walking all day. On, on, never stopping either for meat, or drink, or rest. And even now little she thinks what is coming upon her. How is it all to end?"

"God knows!" said Ninian. "But you must not leave her."

"Mr. Græme—I had a child once, who had her coloured hair and eyes. I've nobody now. No, I shall never leave her!"

St. Giles's chimes were ringing twelve—the lights of the Old Town had all vanished ; and the New Town looked ghostly and deserted, when the three reached Ninian's office. The old clerk who kept watch over the place came out, shading his flaring light, and thinking his master "daft." But even he looked grave when he saw the faces of the two women that followed Mr. Græme. It was evident they were come on a matter of life and death.

"Sit down, Rachel, sit down. Make her rest a minute, Mrs. Sedley."

Rest—to her! She kept walking about with quick, unnatural motion, only saying beseechingly, "The book—can you not find the book?"

It was a good while before he could do so, for he himself was somewhat agitated.

He had rarely felt more strongly moved than when he gave the volume into Rachel's hands. She turned over page after page.

"I—I cannot see clearly; the lines swim."

"Sit down, poor girl!" he said once more; but her limbs refused to stir. He laid the book on the table, and she stood over him —her left hand clutching his chair.

"It will be at the beginning of the S's; S-a—you spell it thus, do you not, Rachel?"

She nodded. Her lips were all dry and dumb.

He looked over the page silently. "Are you quite sure of the name?" He felt her hard gasping breath on his cheek, but there was no articulate answer.

"—I may have passed it by; my mind is rather confused to-night. Look over the book with me!"

She leaned forward; her finger followed his down the pages, word by word, and line by line, to the end of the list.

The name of Sabine was not there.

Ninian expected to hear her fall in a

swoon, but she never moved or uttered a sound. He saw her grasping the chair, her face rigid as that of a corpse which, the life being gone, slowly settles into calm.

“ My poor Rachel, do you guess it now ? Or must I tell you ?”

Her eyes slowly turned upon him. He was terrified by their utter listlessness. He felt that unless roused by some great shock she would die where she stood.

“ Listen, Rachel,” said he firmly, so as to stir her into some life by the shock. “ This man has doubtless been deceiving you all along. Either his story or his name must be false, and whether the marriage was true or not, he has taken away all proof of it. Do you understand now, my poor girl ?”

“ She doesn’t understand—not one word,” whispered Jane Sedley, plucking at Mr. Græme’s sleeve. “ Leave her, sir, just one minute, and let me speak to you. D’ye see this ?” And she held out to him a scrap of paper whereon were written a few lines in an evidently feigned and awkward hand.

“ What is it ?”

“ I’m not quite clear, sir, though I can guess. But it came from *him*, and I durst not show it her, she took on so about the money. Read it, Mr. Græme, please.”

Ninian read it, and shuddered in the reading. Then he glanced at the unhappy girl, whose death-warrant—nay, the doom of worse than death—was now in his hand. Even his firm spirit quailed at the thought of what he had to communicate.

“ It is a cruel—wicked thing, God knows ! And He will assuredly punish it.”

“ Amen !” said faithful Jane Sedley ; and the little withered face grew almost grand in its denunciation. “ That means, sir, that my poor young mistress is—”

“ Hush, look at her !”

They might well look. She had stirred from her motionless posture, and turned her face towards them. It was like that of a person rising out of a cataleptic trance, in which though the body seemed dead the senses and perceptions were awake. She

had evidently heard all that passed. She did not speak, but her eyes were fixed upon the paper with a horrible stare, and there was a quivering in her fingers as if she wished to take it.

“Let her!” said Jane Sedley; “let her read and know what a villain he is; then, maybe, she’ll forget him.”

Ninian also judged it best that with her own eyes she should read her fate. He placed the letter in her hand, but in vain; her poor burning eyeballs seemed to have no power to discern the words.

“Shall I read it?” said Ninian, feeling that somehow or other the truth must be told. Rachel assented.

Thus the paper ran:—“If the woman, Rachel Armstrong, calling herself my wife, should persist in so doing, I hereby declare that what she chooses to consider a marriage was a mere jest to ease her conscience. She is not my wife, and I never will acknowledge her as such. It is useless for her to seek me, as she knows nothing of me—not

even my true name ; and I would advise her to forget she ever heard one which has really no existence, that of G. S.' ”

“ My mistress, my mistress ! ” cried Jane Sedley, and darted forward to her aid.

But Rachel never stirred. Slowly, slowly, the lids fell over her wide-open glassy eyes ; her hand dropped at her side ; she shivered all over like one who through death-throes passes into a new existence. This lasted a few minutes, and then she stood upright.

“ Come, let us go ! ” Words clear, distinct, spoken in a voice natural, yet most unnatural, as it were another woman speaking, and not Rachel. She moved across the room steadily. She even turned back a little way to hold out her hand to Ninian ; it felt like a dead hand, so nerveless, so icy cold.

“ Let me go with you ; or else, will you come to The Gowans ? ” he entreated, but was repelled.

“ It is better not, sir,” Jane Sedley added, as she prepared to follow. “ Leave her to

me: I know a place where I can take her to, and where she will be safe and quiet."

"Where is it?"

"I'll come and tell you to-morrow."

Ninian accompanied them to the door only. The last he saw of Rachel was as she stood under the lamp-light, gazing with stern, hard, unblenching face into the black, black night.

END OF VOL. I.

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